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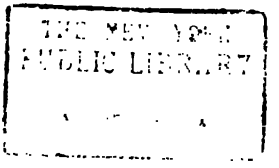

"Poor boy," she whispered, "did you think I did not love you?"
(Page 317.)

TWO SHALL BE BORN

By

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF

"A CAVALIER OF VIRGINIA"

"HEMMING, THE ADVENTURER"

"BROTHERS OF PERIL," ETC.

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TWO SHALL BE BORN

CHAPTER I

THE RETURN

Mr. David Westley had been graduated from the army of successful toilers for the period of two generations of men. He was wealthy and fashionable—and seemingly useless. Had he been an Englishman, with the wealth, ability, and masterful spirit that were his, he would doubtless have been in command of some huge and barbaric district somewhere on some frontier of that sprawling empire. But he was an American, of New York, born to wealth, with no taste for the trade of his fathers or the politics of his countrymen. He knew the world as his father had known Wall Street; and stories of his prowess as a slayer of big game were told at many campfires, in the billiard-rooms of English houses, in city clubs, and on the decks of ships. He was popular with his friends, but not with mere acquaintances.

Westley was just home from Scotland, where he had been deer-stalking with the MacLearn, an

impecunious chieftain. Though only thirty years of age, he found that he had outgrown the somewhat mild excitement of stalking highland deer.

Somewhat low in spirits, he had made his homeward voyage aboard a small and unfashionable vessel sailing from a Scotch port. During the voyage he had heard some talk that had not improved his humor. There were a couple of young fellows aboard whom he did not know, but who evidently knew a good deal about him and his friends. He overheard fragments of their conversation in the deck smoking-room.

"Joice is a mighty decent chap," said one. "Oh, yes, he has nerve. But why shouldn't he cut in? Dorothy Gordon is not such a huge catch, after all, barring her looks. Joice's people in Yorkshire could buy up old Gordon to-morrow without having to sell any of their farms or dismiss any of their servants."

"But that Yorkshire property isn't Walter Joice's," objected the other young man, producing a fat cigarette from a fat case.

"A good half of it shall be his some day," returned his friend. "But what has that to do with it, anyway? If he is keen on the girl, and Westley isn't, and the girl chooses to change her mind, surely he has a right to make the most of it."

"Well, it's all the same to me. I don't want to marry her. We saw a good deal of her in

London, and of Joice, too. What sort is Westley? I saw him once or twice before this trip; but he is older than I am, and having about ten millions more than my old man, circles some five degrees higher in the social blue of New York."

"I don't know any more about him than you do. Why should I? I've heard that he is a good shot, can carry a forty-pound pack all day in a rough country, and is possessed of more ability than his circumstances call for. I have heard some talk of his extraordinary courage, too. Self-contained sort of Johnny, I gather. He is certainly keeping to himself this trip."

Westley, who had been lighting his pipe close to the open door of the smoking-room, on the lee side of the ship, turned and walked away. He felt more depressed than ever, angry, and ashamed. The Dorothy Gordon of whom the young men had spoken was the woman he loved. For the past two years they had been engaged. Captain Walter Joice, D.S.O., late of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, was an English soldier and explorer whom he had met in several parts of the world.

He began to brood over what he had heard concerning Dorothy and Joice. The more he brooded the gloomier he became. All that the young men had said about Joice was undoubtedly true. The Englishman would be rich

enough some day; and his position in Yorkshire and the world at large—independent of money and partly of his own making and partly inherited from generations of distinguished ancestors—was a thing millions could not buy.

Westley knew this. He reflected that he should have been in London; that he should have forced Dorothy to fix a date for the wedding; that he should have made surer of her love before taking too much for granted. He had underestimated Captain Joice's attractions. But after all, ten to one there was nothing to worry about. This thing he had heard in the smoking-room was, very likely, a pipe-dream.

He made himself unusually agreeable to the two youths whose conversation he had overheard, and had the satisfaction of seeing that they had altered their impression of him for the better. But his homeward trip to New York was a dreary affair.

Dorothy Gordon and her mother reached New York ten days ahead of David Westley. Captain Joice crossed with the Gordons; but Westley did not know this. Westley did not know that Joice was in New York until he met him at one of his clubs on the afternoon of the day of his arrival. It was nearly a year since the two men had last met. They shook hands and looked steadily, with veiled inquiry, into one another's

eyes. Westley remarked that this was an unexpected pleasure.

"Same here," said Joice. "I heard that you were in Scotland, with the MacLearn. It used to be MacLearn's boast that he never let a lowlander escape from his mountain fastnesses before Christmas."

Westley laughed pleasantly and replied that he had given the chief the slip easily enough. He then excused himself to the Englishman, and telephoned to Dorothy. He failed to detect anything in the tone of her voice to indicate a guilty conscience. She said, quite naturally, that she was delighted to know that he was home again.

He asked if he might call immediately, and she replied that she would be delighted to see him. Westley's car was waiting for him in front of the club. On his way to it, half-way down the steps of the clubhouse, he became the victim of one of those amazing blind throws of chance which so frequently make and mar the lives of men. He came face to face with a gentleman ascending the steps. A side-glance awoke old memories in him. He halted.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with the Sultan?"

The other grasped Westley's hand and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Bless my soul, it's Dave Westley!" he cried. "Well, this is luck. Eight years since I last set

eyes on you, Dave. Oh, the Sultan is all right; though he doesn't happen to be the same Sultan whom I commenced doing business with. I'm taking a holiday—the first for eight years. On my way across from Liverpool it made me feel quite ill to hear that you were in Scotland, Dave. But this is luck!"

"It's a treat to see you, Dick," replied Westley. "I'm in a rush now; but will you dine with me to-night. Meet me here at eight o'clock."

"Right you are," returned Mr. Richard Starr, the power behind a certain third-rate Eastern throne.

"By the way, Dick, who told you that I had been in Scotland?"

"I heard it aboard the boat. Do you remember the girl we were both after when we were youngsters—Dorothy Gordon?"

"Yes, I remember her very well."

"She told me. She was aboard with her aunt. And there was a mighty decent chap called Joice aboard, too, who seems to have cut us both out. Gad, she has more than fulfilled her promises. She's a queen! If I hadn't this dashed Sultan on my shoulders I'd settle right down here and try to put the kibosh on the Englishman."

"Eight o'clock," said Westley, and ran down the wide steps.

For a minute David Westley leaned back in his rushing car, faint and dazed. Then his in-

jured pride asserted itself, clouded his grief, and steadied him.

He lit a cigarette and tried to think calmly. He was cut to the quick, heart and spirit, and the houses and people of the city swept behind him on either hand in a blur of stupid windows and silly, mocking faces. He remembered that there had been another before him—a man whom he knew only slightly, less wealthy, and weaker than himself. He had also loved Dorothy.

He drove to Mr. Gordon's house, and had not long to wait for Dorothy. She entered the room with both hands extended, but with a light of inquiry, rather than of welcome, in her eyes. There was something half furtive, half fearful, in her look. At sight of his pale cheeks and set jaw, her beautiful, small face flushed pink.

Westley stood up. He did not advance, and he ignored her hands. She halted within a yard of him and let her hands drop to her sides.

"You might have let me know," he said, his voice very low and even more toneless than usual. "I think you owed that much to me as well as to yourself. It is hard on a man's pride, to say the least, to discover the fact that he has been thrown over from the talk of public places. I think I may even venture to say that it is hardly fair to my successor, Captain Joice."

Dorothy trembled, and many poignant and conflicting emotions were flashed and shadowed

in her face. She replied, with an evident effort to control her voice.

"I understand," she said. "It is you who do not understand—who have always failed to understand. You speak of your pride; but it seems that you have never credited me with the same virtue. By what social or moral canon is it compulsory that I should notify you whenever I meet a friend or happen to cross the Atlantic in the same ship with one? Have you kept me so well informed concerning the incidents of your sojourns in Asia, in Africa, in Scotland? Surely if you were so jealous of my actions you might have forsaken your sport in Scotland for a little while and visited us in London."

Westley laughed unpleasantly.

"I am not blind to the fact that I have been a fool," he said.

"I have not said so," returned the girl. "You are too self-centered—too confident—too careless about the feelings of others. If I have taught you a lesson in the consideration of others, I am glad."

"A lesson?" queried Westley. "I am in no mood to shy at a name. The substance of the lesson is what matters—and you have certainly taught me most successfully to despise both you and myself—you for your heartlessness and worldly wisdom and myself for my stupidity. I have now the honor to inform you that I consider

myself removed from the sphere of your instructions."

The girl's face went white as paper at this.

"Are you so utterly blind?" she whispered. And then, "But think a moment—think. What do you really mean?"

"No amount of thought can make my meaning clearer," he replied. "I retire, shaken but enlightened, before Captain Joice's higher bid, having already offered to the limit of my resources."

"Coward!" cried the girl in a choked voice.

"Hardly that, I think," said Westley. "You forget your young brother."

He bowed and left the room and the house.

Dorothy stood for a minute, her hands clenched, her eyes ablaze, white with anger and outraged pride, remorse, and self-pity. Misunderstood and misjudged—surely her cup was full. But to be named an adventuress—to be insulted so in her father's house—and by David Westley! Fear shook her, for if he loved her he should have known. Love is blind only in that it sees with the eyes of the loved one. A wave of disgust with herself went through her, hotter than fire in her veins.

She swayed, groping blindly for support. She had called him a coward—and yet he had risked his life for Tom's two years ago in Africa. Gray and black shadows enwound her; the chimes of a thousand distant belfries struck faint and thin,

but with infinite confusion, upon her ears. She fell close beside and beneath the little table, the legs of which terminated in knuckled claws of brass.

And so her maid found her ten minutes later, colorless, motionless, with a purple bruise above her left temple.

There was a rumpus in the house of John Angus Gordon. If John Angus was a hard man, he was also a hot one. In his veins coursed his racy Scotch blood.

John Angus had known of Westley's visit; and now, in the first wave of hubbub and excitement which convulsed the house of Gordon, he was confronted by the unmistakable mark of a blow upon his daughter's brow. For a minute there was murder in his eye, but Dorothy, reviving quickly under cold water, sat up and read the intention in his eye. She dismissed the servants, then arose, crossed the room unsteadily and locked the door.

"I fainted, daddy," she said. "I fell over there and must have hit my head against the foot of the table, but now I feel quite well."

She sank weakly into a chair. Her eyes became suddenly moist. She laughed a little and held a hand to her eyes. Her father glared down at her, his hard face twisted with concern and rage.

"Where's that pup?" he demanded. "Cleared

out, you may be sure! Fainted, you say?—and fell against the table? D'ye think I don't know the mark of a coward's knuckle, my girl? Oh, I knew there'd be a rumpus, the way you carried on with the Englishman, but may the fiend take me if I thought David Westley would lift his fist to a woman! Let him pitch into the Englishman if he feels so mad—and get his own face punched, by Heaven! Where is he now? I'll fix him. Big and young as he is, and worth ten millions to my one, I'll show him that the man who strikes my girl had better order his coffin first."

"Daddy, you are crazy," exclaimed Dorothy. "David did not strike me. I fainted and hurt myself—as I have told you. My dear daddy, do you honestly think that men like David would strike any woman? And do I ever tell untruths? You have a very hot, foolish temper, dear. You forget that David is a man. You forget what you owe him."

Gordon glared around him uneasily.

"No, I don't forget that," he said. "But that gives him no right to—to think that he can treat you—like this. I'll not stand for it! What was the row about?"

"It was not worth calling a row," replied Dorothy. "He was angry about Captain Joice—as I had intended him to be—and we had a little spat. That is all, daddy. He has learned a lesson."

"This concerns me," said John Angus. "I am still your father—yes, and I've done my best to be a mother to you as well, ever since you were ten years old. I've done my best, Dot. I've been a good father; but, as God knows, a poor mother! I'll call on Westley now. I'll have a little fatherly talk with him."

Dorothy stood up and put her hands on his shoulders.

"You have always been the kindest and dearest of fathers," she said, "and now you will not do anything to hurt me. Please, please say nothing to David about his visit. He has done nothing that calls—for you to talk to him. We were both angry. It was nothing but a spat, daddy. Think of my feelings—and of your own pride."

"And what about young Joice's feelings?" asked Gordon. "I like that fellow; and, by Heaven, it makes me sore to hear that he has been used to teach any man a lesson. I suppose that's what you used him for? My girl, that's a low game. No woman has any right to make use of a straight, simple, clean-bred chap like Walter Joice."

"But he understands," returned the girl, in distress. "We—we are nothing but very good friends, daddy. It—it is unkind of you to speak as if I had done something—something dishonorable. Captain Joice understands. We are

only good friends. He knows that I am engaged to David—and he is a friend of David."

"So you think," said her father. "He's that kind, of course; he'd just grin and stand for anything. But I know more about men than you do, my girl. There, there, don't cry. I'll leave David alone. I'll let him get over his tantrums the best way he can. I am sorry for Joice."

CHAPTER II

THE LAST TOWN

David Westley returned to his club, nodded to half a dozen men whom he knew, mechanically gave up his hat and coat and thrust the metal check in his pocket, sat down in his favorite chair in his favorite room, and unfolded the paper that happened to lie nearest to his hand.

He read for fifteen minutes, blindly, with his eyes only. Suddenly he laid aside the paper and rang a bell at his elbow. He ordered a Scotch-and-soda and a C. P. R. time-table. After a minute's examination of the time-table he sprang to his feet and left the room, and the drink untouched. His own car had been dismissed. A taxi was summoned. He jumped in and gave the address of his own house, a grotesque tower of a place which, though only thirty years old, bulged upon the thoroughfare with Moorish doorways and Gothic windows, Norman battlements and Roman porches.

David did not admire the architectural qualities of the house which his father had built; but

on this occasion he ran up the imposing steps and rang the bell without a glance to right or left. He was too intent on getting inside immediately even to search through his pockets for his latch-key. The ornate door was opened promptly by Hush, his valet. Hush was a middle-aged person, entirely correct and clean-shaven, and perfectly in tune with his name. He opened the door because he was the only servant in the great house. He and his master were the only occupants of the house, for that matter. During the greater part of every year the house was as empty as a drum. Only four of the vast and shapeless rooms were furnished.

"You must pack a couple of boxes," said Westley. "I'll help you, Hush; for I want a selection, and am in a hurry."

"Very good, sir," replied Hush in a voice scarcely stronger than a whisper.

Westley went up a flight of stairs four steps at a time. The valet followed at a swift but respectful gait. The leather trunks, so recently come to rest from their Atlantic crossing, stood in a row in the dressing-room, already unstrapped and unpacked.

But Hush had not yet had time to sort and put away his master's elaborate outfit. Garments of every variety lay about in heaps. Dozens of boots and shoes, each with a tree of yellow wood, stood on the floor, toeing this way and that, like

a disembodied militia company in line. Westley pointed to two cabin trunks.

"Those two boxes will hold all that I'll need out of this kit," he said. "You pack, Hush, as I name the articles I want."

The work progressed for ten minutes in silence.

"I must leave you, Hush," said Westley. "I have to dine with a friend. I'll be back by ten, in time to catch the ten-thirty express for Boston. Keep right on with the packing. Don't put in anything that I won't need—and don't forget my guns."

"Very good, sir," replied the valet. "But may I ask where you are going, sir, so as to have some idea of what articles you may require?"

Westley was already undressing, preparatory to changing into evening clothes. For several seconds he stood with his shirt half off, at a loss for an answer.

"Into the woods," he said at last.

"Yes, sir. North or south, sir?"

"North—though it does not matter. Yes, I am going north, Hush—a long way north."

"Very good, sir; I'll have your things and my own all ready by ten o'clock, sir, and the car ordered to take us to the station."

"But I'm not taking you this trip, Hush. You must stay here and keep house. There'll be a good many things for you to attend to for me,

as I had not intended to leave New York so soon until—until a few hours ago."

"Very good, sir," replied Hush. "Nothing has gone wrong with your affairs, sir, I hope?"

"Nothing, Hush, I assure you," answered Westley, with a slow and somewhat labored smile. "My affairs are in the pink of condition."

"Thank Heaven for that!" breathed Hush. He loved David Westley—with cause.

Westley completed his toilet quickly. He found Starr awaiting him at the club. During the dinner Starr's talk was reminiscent and slightly sentimental. With the coffee, however, his eyes brightened and his manner became brisker.

"My rest-cure is at an end," said he. "I sail again to-morrow."

"What's the trouble?" asked Westley.

"I've received a cable from my Sultan. The poor chap thinks that some of his faithful subjects are working up a little game on him with the object in view of depriving him of his throne. He wants me to come back quick and hold him down in his seat."

"Dick, you are a remarkable man," said Westley. "You talk of making Sultans as I might talk of making—well, mistakes. Mistakes are the only things I've ever made, I think."

"My first Sultan was a mistake," said Starr.

Westley smiled. "I'm off, too," he said. "I'm going north to-night."

"North? What for?"

"Oh, sport! It must be three years since I shot my last moose."

"Moose," repeated Starr, shaking his head. "David, I am sorry for you. Moose are all very well, in their way, and the shooting of them is fair sport; but, as the sole occupation of a lifetime, I think mighty little of it. You do not confine your attention to moose, I know; but elephants and lions do not save you. Sport is sport, my boy—and a man's work in life is quite another thing. It is in you. By the way, didn't you save a man from drowning once, on the Thames—and very nearly croak yourself?"

Westley smiled. "You are right, Dick," he said. "Heaven knows I am not proud of myself. Dozens of chaps I know are better sportsmen than I am; and yet they find time and energy to rule provinces, command regiments, and write books on the side. As to saving a man from drowning—well, that only requires ability to swim. The chap I pulled out of the Thames was James Hush. He is now my valet."

"Come with me," invited Starr. "You are just the man I need for a partner."

David shook his head. "Unmaking Sultans would be more to my taste than making them, I fear," he said. "No, Dick; I'm going north now.

I have never yet forsaken a trip that I have planned. That characteristic is something to my credit, I suppose."

They parted half an hour later. Westley returned to his house, and found the boxes and gun-cases packed and standing in the lower hall and the car waiting. Half an hour later he was off on the first stage of his northward journey. From Quebec he despatched a wire to the postmaster of the last town to the north. Twenty hours later he reached the last town, sent his boxes and gun-cases to the best hotel, and called on the postmaster.

"I've found the right man for you," said the official. "Pierre MacKim is his name, an' he hails from the Smoky River country, to the nor'-east. He come to town to make a dicker with old Ferguson for his nex' season's take of furs. Just happened to catch him. He was intendin' to start back this mornin'; but I got him to wait for you. You'll find him at Bert's Hotel this minute, I guess. Lookin' over timber lands, I take it, mister?"

"No; moose," replied Westley.

"Well, sir," replied the other, "the moose will fair *tromp* on you in the Smoky River country. Much obliged. You'll find Pierre Mackim a smart feller."

David Westley found Bert's Hotel to be an obscure tavern on a back street of the town. The

wall of the house, beneath the narrow roof of the front veranda, was decorated with the antlers and heads of moose, caribou, and deer.

A dozen men sat on the veranda, their chairs tipped backward and their feet up against the posts which supported the roof. Some smoked while others "chawed." Some wore blanket jumpers, and others sat in their shirt-sleeves. From within, through a window to the left of the front door, came a hum of voices, and at times a weedy effort at song.

"Can you tell me if Pierre MacKim is in this house?" asked David.

The men on the veranda stared at him lazily for a few seconds in silence. Several of them spat elaborately.

"Maybe ye'll find him inside," said one down the stem of his pipe.

Westley entered the house and opened the door on the left. He found himself in a foul-smelling, crowded, dingy room. The floor was speckled and spattered with tobacco-juice. The eyes of the inmates were glaring, lower jaws were hanging, feet were scuffling belligerently on the filthy floor, and curses and oaths were flying and settling like a swarm of flies. And it was no later than mid-afternoon. Westley read the signs of the place at a glance.

"Is Pierre MacKim here?" he asked loud

enough to carry above the racket, even to the farthest corner of the room.

The tumult ebbed to half its volume. A score of heated, weather-stained faces were turned to the newcomer. Those employed there looked up from their work with that in their eyes suggestive of savage dogs looking up from half-gnawed bones.

"He ain't here," said one of these. "Left an hour ago."

"Here I am, mister," came a faint voice from the midst of the crowd at the farther end of the room.

Then the tumult flooded up again, full tide. Westley had heard the faint and somewhat muffled voice. He moved toward it, returning the furious glaring of the manager with a chilly stare.

"Are you there, MacKim?" he demanded. "Come out. I want to speak to you."

Westley made his way through the throng with difficulty. Several opposed his passage. He laid them flat, with face set and pale.

"Git out of here, you!" yelled the manager. "We don't allow no fightin' an' rough-house here. Git out an' mind yer own business!"

The knot of men at the end of the room from which the faint voice had sounded was now heaving and twisting like a bootball scrimmage.

Westley ignored the words of the manager, reached the crowd, and tore it apart. He found the core to consist of a slender young man in the grasp of two stalwart ruffians. The young man's face was thin and swarthy, but strangely attractive. He struggled desperately, though his arms were pinned to his sides, and a thin trickle of blood crept down from a wound above his right eyebrow.

"Help, mister—help!" he cried.

Though David Westley had played all his life, he had played at games demanding strength, skill, and endurance—yes, and courage. And beneath a calm surface and quiet manner his temper was hot and quick. At college he had been the strongest man in his year; but he was stronger now.

He jumped forward, gripped one of the men who held MacKim, and yanked him away so violently that he reeled across the room and brought up against the wall with a thump. At that a threatening roar went up, and a dozen men hurled themselves unsteadily at Westley. They were unarmed, however. Westley, cool, big, powerful, and skilled in boxing, sent them spinning and sprawling by twos and threes. He kept a sharp lookout for knives; but the few that were drawn proved harmless in the uncertain grasp of their tipsy owners.

The manager and clerk were sober, however.

They came up and rushed at David. Both reached him, one bringing his jaw in contact with the stranger's right fist, and the other his eye in contact with the stranger's left. One struggled to his feet; but a kick from a Frenchman, intended for David, encountered him in the middle of his waistcoat and put him out of business for the balance of the day.

David Westley and Pierre MacKim left the scene of confusion at the earliest opportunity. The woodsman staggered as he walked.

"So you are MacKim, the man who is going to take me into the Smoky River country?" said David, glancing keenly at his companion and sucking a skinned knuckle before replacing his glove.

"Yes, mister, I'm Pierre MacKim, a trapper for Two Moose House, up in that big country," replied the other. "You come along 'bout the right time, mister, for Pierre MacKim. I thanks you."

"You seemed to be in a bad way, certainly," said the New Yorker. "What were you fighting about? How did you come by that cut on the head?"

"Them fellers try for to make me drunk and take my money. Bad joint, that Bert's Hotel. I go in by accident to talk to one man from Willow River, where I trap one winter with him, long time ago; but my friend not there, and those

fellers git me an' pretend great friendship. They knew, maybe, I have some money on me old Ferguson owe to me all summer. I get one crack on the head; then they take holt of me; then they all crowd round tight, some to get a share of my money an' some because they don't know. Then you come in, mister, an' say my name so it sound mighty good to me; an' that wake me up so I answer, an' feel better an' commence to fight."

"Well, Pierre, I'm glad I happened along in time to be of some use to you," said Westley. "That Bert's is a rough joint, and no mistake. Here we are at my hotel. Come up to my room and talk business."

They talked business, and Pierre told Westley many things about the Smoky River country. Later, they went to the stores, and together selected an outfit for the sportsman and such provisions as could not be obtained beyond the last town.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY TO TWO MOOSE

David Westley and his guide made a four-hours' journey by express from the last town, and then got off at a little wayside station. From here a narrow-gauge branch line took them ten miles to St. Anne's. Here were fifteen frame dwellings, a church, a saloon, a store, a blacksmith-shop, and a sawmill.

It stood at the mouth of Smoky River, on the northern bank of the Sunpoke. Hills and the flashing waters of the two rivers shut it in. The flanks of many of the hills were black from the gnawing of forest fires. The flanks of others were ragged with stumps, rusty red tops and branches, climbing companies of young spruce and white birch.

It was a half-healed, man-made scar upon the breast of the wilderness. Westley had seen many places like it during previous hunting-trips to the north; but now the brush and stumps of the ragged hills, the flashing of the shallow rivers and the thin, blue sky over all held a new, vague meaning for him. He saw that the wilderness is greater than the game it breeds. He felt

something of its slow but persistent resistance to the advance of man.

The two spent the night at the house of the mill-owner, and shortly after dawn loaded Pierre's big birch canoe, built heavy and strong against the wear, tear, and mischances of swift waters, and started up Smoky River.

For the first five miles the paddles served their purpose well enough; then, coming to brisker water, Pierre stood up in the stern of the canoe and plied his long, iron-shod pole of spruce. Shortly before noon they were forced to a half-mile portage.

During the afternoon they crawled up three rapids and carried around another. It was hard work—harder than deer-stalking in the highlands of Scotland—and Westley's big muscles soon began to feel it keenly. Pierre MacKim seemed tireless, though he did more than his share of the heavy poling.

They ran the canoe to shore and made camp at sunset, sixteen miles above St. Anne's and the mouth of the river. The day had been bright and fairly warm; but with the setting of the sun a chill, suggestive of frost, settled down upon wood and water.

"We ain't gettin' in any too soon," remarked Pierre.

They pitched their lean-to tent among the spruces of a wooded knoll overlooking the river.

Westley got into his sleeping-bag soon after supper, feeling in no mood for conversation. He was sulky and depressed. Though his muscles ached and his eyelids were heavy, he did not fall asleep until close upon midnight.

He wondered, dully yet bitterly, just what variety of a fool he was now making of himself. He saw again, as in a living picture, his last meeting and parting with Dorothy Gordon. Self-pity gnawed him one moment and anger the next. A longing to return to her immediately possessed him while he dozed for half a minute; with his mind off its guard, he decided to start back for civilization next day; but, wide awake again, he called himself a fool for the weakness.

He would stay out of the world until the hurt the woman had done him was healed. The healing would require a month, perhaps—perhaps a year. But however long it took it should be accomplished. He swore to that. She had played with him. She had played an underhand game, and when discovered she had tried to put the blame upon him. She cared nothing for him, nothing for his love, his suffering, nor his self-respect.

So Westley lay awake while his heart and mind tortured him. And all the while he pretended to sleep, for fear that Pierre would disturb the tortures with talk of rapids and moose and men. He wanted to suffer!

Dawn was sifting gray through the spruces when David Westley opened his eyes from a dreamless sleep. He saw Pierre MacKim squatting above the red heart of the fallen fire, coaxing it to flame again with twigs and bark beneath the blackened kettle. The air was sharp as splintered ice. White frost glittered on the moss in front of the tent.

Pierre turned his head and nodded, smiling.

"Mighty cold mornin', mister," he said. "Plenty frost las' night, you bet. I break a scum of ice on the river this mornin' when I fill the kittle. We gotter hump along, or maybe the ice make thick afore we get all the way in to my country. We got pretty near seventy mile to go yet 'twixt here an' Two Moose House."

David sat up in his sleeping-bag. He felt better in mind and body. He sniffed the keen air, fragrant with the scent of frost-nipped earth, and leaves and broken water. The blood leaped in his arteries—the red blood of the hunter. Here was a royal hunting ground. Here was a balm for the healing of wounds.

"We may have a good many nights of frost before this river freezes over," he said. "A scum of ice does not mean much this time of year up in this part of the world."

"That's right, mister," returned Pierre. "We have Injun summer now—but we have him quite a while already. Injun summer mighty fine an'

comfortable—but it end mighty sudden. An' old Smoky look so almighty strong an' swift you say nothing hold him; but when the frost once get into his heart he freeze quick an' solid, with just a little air-hole at every rapid, maybe. Anyway, mister, I guess we know what to do if we do get froze on the river."

They climbed the swift river all day, in some places fighting for every yard of advance against the snarling current. The country through which they passed was wild and uninhabited; but here and there the forests showed where the lumbermen had been.

During the long, bright day they passed only one human habitation, a lumber-camp in a stump-jagged clearing on the right bank. The axmen were all back in the woods, from which the sharp *tuck-tuck* of their strokes on the living spruce beat out to them on the clear air. The cook stood in the low doorway of the camp, polishing a tin pan. He waved his dish-cloth to them as they crawled past the clearing, out in the flashing water of mid-stream. Westley waved his hand in reply. Something in the scene appealed strongly to him.

"Big outfit?" he inquired.

"You bet," replied Pierre. "That Andy Brown's outfit. Four teams of hosses—yes, an' one mighty good cook. But this old Smoky pretty cussed bad river for drivin' out the logs.

It need a lot of blastin', an' it get a lot of cussin' every spring. Yes, you bet. Andy bin loggin' hereabouts five year now—an' one year he hang up his whole winter's cut back there at Double Knuckle Bend."

During the day they poled up four bits of swift water and carried around three stretches of swifter. They saw moose, a bear, geese, and ducks. Westley bagged one duck, and they broiled it for supper.

Westley lay awake only one hour that night.

In launching the canoe that morning they broke a skin of ice from the shallow and moderately still water along the shore. The sun came up in a clear sky; but the air was really mellow for only an hour or so about noon. A sharp wisp of wind fanned out of the northwest all day.

"I guess Injun summer 'bout ready to crawl into his winter lodge an' lace the flap across the door," said Pierre.

At the time of sunset of the third day they reached the cabin of one Sacobie, an ancient Maliseet of unmixed blood. In the three days they had made fifty miles. They were still separated from Two Moose House, the Hudson Bay Company's post of the Smoky River country, by twenty-five or thirty miles of broken water. The sun sank in a film of ashen gray cloud.

Since noon the voyagers had exchanged no

more than half a dozen remarks. David Westley's spirit was down again, worried by uncertainty, regret, and longing.

Old Sacobie met them at the edge of the water, a squat figure surmounted by a large head in a rusty and shapeless felt hat. The door of the cabin stood open behind him, letting out a flicker and jump of red firelight into the chilly dusk.

"How do?" said Sacobie. "You come back safe, Pierre?"

"How do?" returned Pierre. "Yes, I come back safe, you bet. This here is David Westley, one mighty fine feller. I take him up into my country an' give him plenty good huntin', you bet."

"Dat right," said Sacobie, nodding to Westley. "Come in now. Grub all ready. Plenty good moose-meat fryin' on de pan."

They entered the cabin. Sacobie lit a smoky lamp and dished the supper, which consisted of stale biscuits, fried moose-steak, and boiled tea served without milk. All ate heartily, however. Then they filled their pipes from David's pouch.

"You get pinched, yes," said Sacobie. "Old Smoky, he freeze to-night, yes. You one day too late, I guess."

"Surely the river won't freeze across in one night," said David.

"Maybe," returned Sacobie. "He freeze mighty hard on de edges, anyhow. Middle all

open, maybe; but what good dat do you? No man ever pole canoe up de middle of old Smoky, 'tween dis here an' Two Moose."

"Well, I guess we hoof it," said Pierre easily. "We can do it."

"Den you hoof it quick," returned Sacobie, settling the gaze of his black eyes full upon the young trapper. "Yes, you get home mighty quick, Pierre MacKim. Steve Canadian, him back on dis country now. Yes, dat right. I see him. Maybe he lookin' out for Marie Benoit. She know him pretty well two, t'ree year back, down to St. Anne's. Steve Canadian mighty smart feller—yes; but bad Injun. You best get home quick, Pierre. You t'ink Marie yer girl now, I guess."

Westley looked inquiringly at Pierre. Here was more trouble, evidently—and again with a woman at the bottom of it. He saw Pierre start in his seat as if to spring forward. He saw the dark eyes narrow and flash, the thin young face grow thinner in a moment.

Then, leaning forward, with his eyes full upon those of the old man, Pierre said: "You see Steve Canadian on this river?"

"Yes, I see him an' say how do," replied Sacobie. "Too scare to say any more—just how do. Him mighty bad man—an' Sacobie old man an' live all alone. He say, 'Where Marie

Benoit these days?' I tell him 'How I know? Go ax Pierre MacKim.' Yes, I tell him dat."

"An' what Steve Canadian say when you tell him that?" asked Pierre, his voice low and dry, his upper lip drawn back as if he snarled.

"Steve, he laugh," replied Sacobie. "He say he don't care one little bit fer no Pierre MacKim. Yes, he say dat. 'Who dis yer Pierre MacKim, anyhow?' he say. 'One Scotchman?' he ax."

Pierre sighed and turned to Westley. "Steve know who I am, all right," he said. "He know I ain't no pure-blood Scotchman—or he'd be almighty scart of me. Yes, he know my father one Scotch half-breed, my mother one French half-breed. He don't know, maybe, my father's father one big man in the Hudson Bay Company, back in the old times. He think me too much mix' blood to be brave, I guess. Well, he find out his one big mistake, maybe."

"Steve Canadian shoot you on de back, Pierre, dat what he do wid you an' yer gran'-father," said Sacobie. "Yer gran'father one big man in de company, oh, yes—but dat big man dead long time, I guess, an' you jes one common trapper, Pierre."

"You mustn't do anything rash, Pierre," said Westley.

The conversation depressed him. He had not

expected to find anything of this kind in the northern wilderness, away and away in from the nearest railway.

"If the girl is playing a double game she is certainly not worth fighting about," he added. "In that case you had better let the bad Indian have her."

"You don't know Marie," returned Pierre gravely. "She play no game with anybody. She a white girl, mister—pretty near. She never look at any dirty red Injun like Steve Canadian."

"Dat right," said Sacobie, wrinkling his eyebrows. "Injun mighty dirty feller, you bet, when he go work on de sawmills an' de river, an' maybe way off on de big town, like Steve Canadian done. Yes, he larn plenty dirty tricks dat time from de white man."

The morning was bitterly cold and gray. A cold, blustering wind swooped out of the black mountains to the north and nor'west. The river was frozen to a distance of six or eight yards from both shores. The ice was black and tough.

"I guess we make one big try at it, anyhow," said Pierre. "We tow the canoe along the shore—break the ice with our feet."

They rigged a tow-line to the bow of the loaded canoe. Pierre took the first "spell" at the towing, and Westley stood in the stern and forged on the pole.

It was slow work, and desperately hard on the man who waded knee-deep in the cold water, breaking the tough ice at every step and dragging on the heavy canoe. But Pierre said that it was easier and quicker than packing that weight of outfit thirty miles along a rough shore, through tangled brush and over roots and boulders. After the first half-hour Westley insisted on taking his turn at the tow-line and ordered Pierre into the stern of the canoe. Pierre was all for sticking to his job; but after the third time of telling and a glance at the big New Yorker's face he obeyed smartly enough. He admitted the other's mastership without sulking.

Westley dragged the canoe along at a round pace, trampling the new ice to splinters with his well-shod feet. He felt strong and tireless, for the wilderness had already put the finishing touch to his splendid muscles. He delighted in the hard work—the fight, foot and hand, against the ice and swift water.

Here was something to fight and overcome, to face honestly, and master with strength and wit. Here was the stuff to dull memory and regret.

At noon they built a roaring fire, warmed and dried themselves, and ate heartily. The sun struggled out of the dreary clouds for half an hour. They rested and smoked their pipes while the sun warmed them, then launched out

again into the frozen river. The clouds thinned to nothing before sunset; the wind fell; the cold became more intense.

When Westley awoke at dawn the moss, dead ferns, and gray boulders were white and fuzzy with frost. The black ice spread out from both shores of the river, leaving only a narrow, snarling channel in midstream. Pierre had the kettle boiling and the bacon sizzling in the pan.

"I guess this is where we leave the canoe," he said, glancing over his shoulder. "We get pinched now, an' fifteen mile still to go. Well, we make Two Moose afore sundown, anyhow."

After breakfast the canoe was unloaded and lifted up from the shore and deposited in the heart of a thicket of young spruces. It was covered with bark and spruce branches.

The outfit and provisions were divided into three equal parts. Two of these were made up into packs for carrying, and the third was stowed away beneath the canoe. Then the strenuous journey afoot was begun. Pierre led the way.

At first they tried to travel on the new ice close inshore; but after each had slipped a couple of times, falling heavily, dropping the packs and breaking through to the icy water, they took to the rougher, but safer, way among the bushes.

David was not accustomed to carrying a pack,

and he suffered much after the first half-mile. He was frequently forced to call a halt, to ease the knotted, aching muscles of neck and shoulders. He admitted his weakness in this department of woodcraft frankly and cheerfully. Throughout the desperate journey he kept his temper unruffled. His spirits were high.

It was only when he was idle and comfortable that he felt the bitterness of his position and the gnawings of doubt and regret. But Pierre, who seemed to be tireless physically, was low in his mind and at the same time fretfully anxious. He spoke little, and brooded continually over what Sacobie had told him of the return of Steve Canadian.

In time they came to a rough track which soon brought them to a big, empty clearing. As they crossed this clearing they heard the barking of dogs from the black woods beyond.

"We pretty near Two Moose," said Pierre. "We soon be there."

The sun was low. The shadows were long in the empty clearing. A human figure stepped from the shadows in front of them and halted in their path.

"How do, Pierre," said a harsh and derisive voice. "What t' deuce you come back home for, anyhow?"

Westley knew, without a doubt, that this was Steve Canadian, the "bad Injun."

CHAPTER IV

A RIDE IN THE PARK

In the failing light he could see nothing of the fellow's face—only the tall, slouching figure and the rifle in his hand. But the insolence in the attitude of the figure and the tones of the voice brought his quick blood beating up into his brain. Westley did not give way to this anger immediately, however, but glanced at Pierre MacKim. That young man let his heavy pack slide from his shoulders to the frozen ground.

"I come back home, Steve, 'cause I very well please to," he said quietly, but with a hint of breathlessness in his voice. "I come, I go; I 'tend my own business how I please. What you got to say to that?"

"I say you best git out of dis country," returned the other.

Westley laid his hand heavily on Pierre's shoulder.

"You keep quiet, Pierre," he said almost threateningly. "Hear me? I mean it—and I'm not the man to cross. You stand right there now and keep your mouth shut."

He faced Steve Canadian.

"I know about you," he said at a venture. "If you don't want the police to get you, you'd better light out of here quick—and keep out." He stepped forward and stared at the Indian. In the dim light he looked even larger than he really was.

"Move on," he said, "or I'll grab you by your dirty neck and take you up to the factor. He'll hold you until the police arrive—if I ask him to."

Steve Canadian swore; but his eyes wavered and fell before the New Yorker's cold and daunting regard. He moved away and was presently lost among the shadows.

"Now he turn an' shoot us in the back," said Pierre in a whisper.

"No fear," returned Westley.

"I wonder if he talk any to Marie," said the trapper.

"No decent woman would let a dog like that talk to her," returned Westley. His blood was up. For some unaccountable reason he hated the bad Indian like an old enemy.

Captain Walter Joice had half a dozen social engagements for every day of the week, for he was as popular in New York as he was at home. He cared nothing for the life, however, considering it a shocking waste of both time and energy.

Only the fact that Dorothy Gordon was in the city, and in the same social swirl, kept him to it.

He knew that he was a fool to stay; yet he remained, admitting himself to be a fool. He knew that the girl was engaged to David Westley. He knew that David Westley was not the kind of man women break with. And yet he stuck to it as his ancestors had stuck to many a lost cause, suffering teas and dinners and dances with a calm exterior and a nerve that had once helped to win a battle. Joice had not been given his distinguished service order for nothing.

Joice was free of half a dozen clubs; but he used only one of them, and that the smallest of the six. He sat in a quiet reading-room of this club one afternoon, alone, pensively amused at his own futile behavior. He was playing a fool's game, he reflected—a game in which he could not declare trumps. He had been lunched that day by some people whom he had met in London. These people were intimate with the Gordon's, and so he had expected to find Dorothy there. She had not been there, however. It was two days now since he had seen her.

A servant entered the room, glanced around, then turned toward the door.

"Yes, sir, Captain Joice is here," he said. He

stood aside while the sturdy figure of John Angus Gordon entered. Then he left the room noiselessly, drawing the door half-shut behind him.

At sight of Dorothy's father, the captain felt a flutter of consternation go through his veins. He had met Gordon three or four times, had exchanged commonplaces with him, but knew him no more than he knew the Sphinx.

"Ah, here you are, Captain Joice," said Gordon. "I thought I'd find you."

His strong, ruddy face showed some haggard lines which Joice had never noticed there before. This added considerably to the Englishman's wonder and concern. He got promptly to his feet, smiling agreeably.

"Are you looking for me, sir?" he queried.

"Yes," returned the other. He hesitated for a moment, glancing around the quiet room. "Yes, captain, you are the man I am looking for."

"Ah—delighted," returned Joice, vaguely uneasy. "Won't you sit down, sir, and allow me to ring for something?"

Gordon sat down in the nearest chair, without glancing at it, and shook his head.

"No, thanks—not now," he said. "I want to talk to you."

He shot a keen glance at the Englishman, then turned his face away.

"I want to speak to you about my daughter," he said.

Joice gasped. His lower jaw sagged and his face flamed crimson.

"I—I beg your pardon?" he stammered.

Mr. Gordon looked at him and nodded his head.

"Yes, about my daughter," he said calmly. "Why not? Why shouldn't I speak about my daughter if I want to, to a man like you—to her friend? That's it—to her friend—and to a man like you."

With an effort, Joice recovered something of his usual composure.

"You are very good to say so," he returned. "I'm honored, sir."

"She has had a row with David Westley," said Gordon, gazing at the other from beneath shaggy, overhanging brows. "She says it was only a slight misunderstanding; but I know better. They quarreled in my house. She won't admit it—but I know it. She has the pride of the devil, that girl. I don't know what to do about it. I was all for going after Westley and giving him a good hiding when I first saw the bump on her forehead—but she begged me not to."

Captain Joice sat and stared at the elder man. At mention of the bump on Dorothy's forehead his face went white as the marble of

the clock above the fireplace. He leaned forward quickly, his blue eyes flashing.

"A bump?" he exclaimed. "A bump on her forehead? What do you mean by that? Do you mean to imply that—that Westley—struck—her?"

"Steady, Joice," exclaimed Gordon, daunted by the expression on the Englishman's face. "Not so fast, if you please. I like your show of spirit, man, but there's no need for you to attack me. I thought he had struck her, and was mad enough to kill him—but she said he didn't. She says that she fell and hurt herself—after he had gone. She swears to it—but she would swear to anything to save her pride."

Captain Joice looked relieved.

"She wouldn't lie," he said. "I know your daughter better than that. And now that I think of it calmly, Westley is not the kind of man to lift his hand against any woman. Westley—is a friend of mine. Yes, I have known him for some time—and I like him."

Gordon studied him keenly for several seconds before replying.

"No doubt you are right, Captain Joice," he said. "Westley would not strike any woman. Well, let it go at that; but the row still remains."

The color flooded back to Captain Joice's face. His eyes lighted. His heart expanded,

and hope soared in him. But he could not think of anything to say, of anything safe or sane that in any way suited the occasion. So he sat in the deep chair and stared at Mr. Gordon as if that stalwart gentleman had cast a spell over him.

"I'll be quite frank with you," said Gordon. "I've been frank already, perhaps. I am a man of sudden and strong likes and dislikes. Ask anybody—anybody who knows me. And I don't often make mistakes. I sometimes make mistakes in my dislikes, but never in my likes. I like you, Joice—and I like everything I've ever heard about you from men or women. Yes, sir, I like you, I respect you, and you don't hair me up the way some young fellows do."

And still Joice could not think of a suitable reply. His mind was in a silly whirl, and his tongue felt stiff as a stick. Hope, love, astonishment, and embarrassment possessed him, each in turn and all together.

"Yes, Joice, I like you—and I think Dorothy likes you," continued Gordon.

"Steady, sir. Steady," gasped Joice. "I—I have no right to listen. You have no right to say such things. Consider, sir, how she—your daughter—would feel if she knew you were talking in this way to me. It—isn't just the thing."

"Oh, shucks!" retorted Gordon. "What do I

care about the thing! Suppose what I say to you does not happen to be the right thing—according to Hoyle or some other fool—so long as I know it to be the true thing? Now I am saying what I believe to be the truth. I want to see my girl happy. Am I right in thinking that you are in love with her?"

The Englishman trembled as if he had been struck in the face.

"You—you are right," he whispered. "Yes, I love her; but I want you to know, Mr. Gordon, that I have never said so. I have never told her. I've never told anybody. Understand that, sir. I have played the game. It has been hard, sometimes; but I have played it."

The two stared at each other for a time.

"Oh, the game," said Gordon. "I understand. It is the game of the Englishman—especially of the English gentleman. I have met a good many of them who didn't play it, though. But, of course, you would play it."

He got to his feet.

"I think I have said what I wanted to," he continued. "You know how things stand—and where I stand."

Captain Joice also stood up. The two shook hands without a word. Then Mr. Gordon left the room and the club, walking swiftly and belligerently.

At the top of the broad steps that dropped down to the avenue he paused for a second to snip a cigar and pop it into his mouth. Without waiting to light the weed, he ran down the steps and began shouldering his way up the avenue.

"Well, that's done," he reflected. "Perhaps, I've made a mistake; but my intentions were good, anyhow. Now I'll get back to business as soon as I walk some of the fog out of my brain."

Captain Joice continued to sit in the quiet room of that quiet club for half an hour motionless in the deep chair, dazed and torn by conflicting emotions. Hope was dominant—hope and a mad sort of joy. Bewilderment gripped him, too, and a vague pricking of shame.

He had an engagement for dinner, but he forgot it. He left the club soon after dusk and walked the streets until ten o'clock. At last he halted before the ornate front of David Westley's house.

"I'll talk to Westley," he muttered. "He is a decent chap. By Heaven, I'll play the game according to the book, if it kills me."

He ascended the imposing steps and rang a bell in the high, unlighted porch. Hush opened the door, and the light from one lamp in the wide hall illumined the caller's face. Hush knew him by sight.

"Mr. Westley is not at home, sir," he said. "He is out of town, sir, I regret to say."

"Out of town?" echoed the captain. "I am sorry for that. I want to see him—on very important business."

"Business, sir?" queried Hush respectfully.

"Well, on an important matter," returned the other. "When do you expect him back?"

"He went away night before last," replied the valet, "and I have not received any word from him yet, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but you are Captain Joice, sir, are you not?"

"Yes, I am Walter Joice," admitted the captain.

"Thank you, sir. I asked to make sure. Mr. Westley said that he was going north, into the woods. I think he intended to go up into Canada, sir—perhaps into Quebec. He took his guns. I hope to hear from him in a few days, sir. He promised to send me his address. If the matter you speak of is very important, sir, I will give you the address as soon as I get it."

Captain Joice did not answer immediately. Fate seemed to be playing into his hands. He felt dazed.

"Very well," he said slowly. "You will hear from him in a few days, you think? Very well. If you will drop a line to me at my club, the Saxon, when you hear, I'll be greatly obliged."

He slipped a coin into Hush's hand.

"Thank you, sir," said Hush.

Captain Joice spent a sleepless night. He knew that Westley had acted foolishly, in a fit of temper; but was it fair to take advantage of that foolishness? Westley had gone north into the woods, so unexpectedly that even his man had been taken by surprise, and was now wondering if anything was wrong.

During the morning Joice could not settle down to anything. He lunched alone, then dressed with unusual care. He had made up his mind to call on Dorothy Gordon.

It was a few minutes after five when he left the taxicab and rang the bell at Mr. John Angus Gordon's front door. The man who opened to him informed him that Miss Gordon was not at home this afternoon, and was even now dressing to ride in the park. He knew the captain. Joice produced one of his cards and scribbled on it: "May I ride with you? If so, I can meet you at the west entrance in half an hour."

The butler took the card and returned with the word that Miss Gordon would be delighted to ride with Captain Joice. Then Joice tore away for his temporary home, bribing the driver of the taxi to risk everything for the sake of speed. He changed into boots and breeches in seven minutes and a half, having first telephoned to the stable for his horse.

Joice scanned Dorothy's face anxiously as he rode up to her. He saw that her cheeks were paler than usual, and that faint shadows lurked under her eyes. After the first greetings they cantered side by side in silence for ten minutes. Then Dorothy pulled her mare to a trot, and immediately afterward to a walk. Joice pulled his big bay shoulder to shoulder with the mare.

"Dorothy," he said, "I—I want to know something.

She glanced at him, and swiftly away again. Her small face flushed pink, and a shadow of dismay filled her eyes.

"Something has happened," he said, "and I am going to speak—at last. I do not know that I have a right to speak, but I must."

She turned her face fairly to him. Her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"Please don't," she whispered. "Walter, please don't speak—and please forgive me. I have done wrong. I—have depended so on your friendship."

The light went out of the Englishman's face, and the hope out of his heart. But he smiled courageously.

"You—love him—still?" he asked.

She bowed her head, then stripped off a gauntlet and put out a hand to him.

"I love him as greatly as I honor you," she whispered.

Joice crowded the big bay close against her mount, raised her hand to his lips, then let it fall.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"I do not know," she replied.

He stared unblinkingly at his horse's ears.

"If you want me to find out where he is, I'll do it," he said.

CHAPTER V

"THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN THE PROVINCE"

It was dark when David Westley and Pierre MacKim entered the big clearing, in the middle of which stood Two Moose House and its dependent buildings. The post consisted of the factor's house, the store, a dozen cabins (some frame, some built of logs), a flagstaff and a canoe-shed.

Yellow lamplight blurred the darkness from several of the narrow windows. Dogs barked as the two voyagers advanced toward the clustered habitations in the center of the rough clearing.

A man was singing in one of the cabins; a mouth-organ was being played somewhere, and a fiddle tortured somewhere else.

Pierre led the way to a cabin standing several hundred yards from the center of the post, in a little fenced garden of its own. A light shone in a window beside the door.

"This my cabin," said Pierre. "My mother, she live here, and one little girl that belong to my sister. She is dead now, my sister, an' her

man, John Harris, he never come out of the woods last spring. His canoe strike an' break up 'way up Dominick's Brook. Yes, we find him in June, poor feller."

The door of the cabin opened and a woman and a big dog ran out. The woman threw her arms around Pierre's neck, and the dog sprang up against him, clawing at his clothing and yelping with delight. The woman was Rosie MacKim, Pierre's mother.

She was a French half-breed, and Indian blood ages quickly in the veins of the women of the wilderness. She was no more than forty years of age, but when David Westley saw her face in the lamplight he thought her an old woman of between sixty and seventy years.

All entered the main apartment of the cabin, which was kitchen and living-room in one. Pierre presented David to his mother.

"This is David Westley, who hire me to bring him into the Smoky River country," he said. "He is a mighty rich sport, I guess; but he is one good feller, too. He know all about the woods, an' the river, too—yes, as good as any trapper. He sleep right here to-night, mother, an' to-morrow we fix up one empty shack for him."

"Yes, that very good," replied the woman, eying the big New Yorker with wonder and awe in her gaze. "You tired, I think, *monsieur*. I

make gran' bed on de floor for you an' Pierre, *monsieur*. Now I cook one gran' supper, for you mighty hungry, I think. Pierre, what for you go out the door again now?"

"I go for one minute, two minute," replied the trapper.

"Oh, yes, you go see Marie Benoit, I guess," returned the woman. "Steve Canadian, he is in dis country now, an' he make life one misery for dat girl. Maybe he lay 'round now, dis minute, with his gun, ready for to shoot you, Pierre. You come back quick. You not even take one look yet at the little one, layin' so beautiful an' easy in her little crib."

Pierre went out, closing the door behind him. By this time Westley had deposited his pack in a corner and taken a seat by the stove. He was dog-tired. He produced a cigarette-case from an inner pocket and lit a fat cigarette. He sighed, stretched out his long legs, and closed his eyes. He opened them presently to find Rosie MacKim gazing at him diffidently, expectantly. He sat up in the chair and smiled reassuringly.

"I am tired," he said. "Pierre and I have had a hard day."

"Oh, yes, *monsieur*," replied the woman: "you are tired, but you soon eat an' sleep. You like my boy, *monsieur*? You think him one good, smart feller, maybe?"

"Yes, he is a fine fellow," replied Westley. "I like him."

"I mighty feared for him," said the woman. "Dis Steve Canadian one bad Injun. I feared he do some hurt to my boy, all for Marie Benoit. I fear every minute—every day—every night, *monsieur*."

"Don't worry about Steve Canadian," said Westley. "We met him a little while ago. He is a coward, I think, and Pierre is able to take care of himself. If he isn't—well, there is a law in this country."

"Oh, yes, *monsieur;* but de law never come into dis country till after some one get shot, an' dat don't bring nobody back to life."

"If Steve gets gay—acting bad, you know—I'll get the factor to send him out of the country. I think I could get the factor to oblige me," said Westley.

"Oh, the factor, *monsieur?* Yes, Donal' Grant one mighty obligin' man; but lazy, lazy, *monsieur*. He sit, he smile, he smoke his cigar, an' oblige everybody. He have very kind heart, *monsieur* the factor. He kind to everybody. Yes, even to Steve Canadian. He don't like trouble. *Monsieur* the factor he smoke on his new cigar an' say, 'Peace! Peace!' "

Westley laughed. Rosie MacKim laughed too, shrugged her shoulders, even as her French father had shrugged his, and snapped the youth-

ful, black eyes in her colorless, wrinkled face. Then she turned to the task of getting supper. Westley settled himself in the chair again and dozed. Twenty minutes later Pierre came home, whistling like a bird. His thin face was glowing and his dark eyes dancing.

"I guess you see Marie," said his mother, glancing up from the pan in which she was frying moose-meat and bacon.

"Yes, I see her, an' talk with her," replied Pierre. "Now I go in an' see the little one asleep so beautiful in her crib."

The two men ate heartily, then smoked their pipes, and rolled up in many thick blankets on the kitchen floor.

When they awoke they found that snow had fallen during the night. The sky was clear now, and the air was bitterly cold. After an early breakfast they left the cabin together.

"You want to hunt moose to-day, maybe?" queried Pierre.

"No, I'll rest to-day," replied Westley. "I'll make a call on the factor, and then fix up the shack you spoke about. The moose will keep; but what about the rest of our outfit? We'll be needing that, Pierre."

"Yes, I send two boys out for that last night," said Pierre. "I think maybe some thief find it—some thief like Steve Canadian. You leave some mighty good stuff there under the canoe,

mister—plenty of cartridge for rifle, plenty of condensed milk, 'baccy, an' tent, an' one good gun. Steve Canadian one big thief. He would take that mighty quick, so I send two boys out last night, before I go to see Marie."

"Good for you," said Westley. "You have a head on your shoulders, sure enough. Now, you go see about that cabin for me, and I will call on Mr. Donald Grant."

David found Mr. Grant in the company's store, talking to Mr. Duff, the storekeeper. Grant was a tall, thin man, with a straggling beard on cheeks and chin, a drooping mustache, and mild, blue eyes. His hair was iron-gray. He wore a shabby suit of gray tweed, a wolf-skin overcoat, hanging open, a tweed cap, and tan boots. He was smoking a cigar.

Duff was short and fat, his face clean-shaven, and his eyes dark as an Indian's. But his blood was pure white. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his homespun trousers were tucked untidily into the tops of a pair of high boots that had known better days. A clay pipe adorned the corner of his wide mouth. Both men advanced to the door to welcome the New Yorker. They shook his hand heartily.

"My name is Westley, David Westley," said the sportsman. "I came in last night with Pierre MacKim, and expect to stay quite a while

—all winter, perhaps. I am looking for a change."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Westley," said the factor. "If I were a swearing man I'd put it stronger than that. This is a lonely place. If you come from New York, or London, you'll get change enough, I fancy."

"That's right," said Mr. Duff, shifting his pipe from one corner of his mouth across his face to the other. "That's right. Change enough."

"Have you breakfasted Mr. Westley?" asked the factor.

David said that he had breakfasted very well at Mrs. MacKim's.

"Then come over to the house and have a talk," invited the factor.

The factor's house was roomy, empty, and none too clean. The living room was lighted by two small windows which needed washing. A fire hummed and crackled in a square sheet-iron stove. Three fat dogs of no particular breed lay on a caribou-skin near the stove. A heavy deal table occupied the middle of the room. It was cluttered with books, manuscripts, several dozen cartridges and empty cigar-boxes.

The rest of the room's furniture consisted of three broken easy chairs, a gun-case with a

glass door, four unsteady looking book-cases, a stuffed loon, a stuffed fox, and a few photographs.

David stared around him, for this was not what he had expected to find at Two Moose House.

"Sit down, Mr. Westley," said Grant. "You'll find the chair with the red cushion firm in all four legs. Help yourself to a cigar."

Westley sat with the factor for an hour, smoking and doing his best to make conversation.

The factor was not an easy man to talk to. He seemed good-natured and glad to have his visitor with him, but for the greater part of the hour he sat slouched in his chair, with his long, slender hands clasped in his lap, and a far-away look in his mild blue eyes. He asked a few questions about the big cities of the world —about London, Paris, and New York. These questions showed a knowledge of the first two cities. He seemed to feel no curiosity about Westley himself.

"You'll find plenty of game in this country," he said. "Yes, plenty of sport of that kind. I'm not much of a sportsman myself."

When Westley got up to leave, the factor seemed to make an effort to brisk up a bit. He said that he hoped Westley would drop in to see him that evening. Better still, he hoped he would dine with him. Westley went away,

and as he passed the window he glanced in and saw that the factor was already stooping above the papers on the table.

The young men who had gone after the remainder of the outfit came in at noon. Westley was in his own cabin by that time, helping Pierre rig up a stove and stovepipe.

The cabin was low, and strongly built. It contained two rooms. Westley saw that it could easily be made into comfortable winter quarters. As he and Pierre walked over to Pierre's home for the midday meal they met Marie Benoit. She bowed to the stranger, glancing at him shyly. Her forehead was white beneath the edge of the fur-lined hood which she wore. A flush of pink tinted her round cheeks beneath the delicate tan. Her eyes were dark and bright, her lips very red and finely shaped.

She was of pure French blood. Westley was astonished and impressed by her beauty.

Marie and Pierre talked together, in low tones, for a minute. The girl laughed once, and there was music in it. Presently she turned and entered her father's cabin, and the two men passed on their way.

"There," said Pierre, his face aglow. "Is she not wonderful, Marie?"

"She is a very pretty girl," said Westley. "Yes, she is wonderful."

"Down in St. Anne's you see no girl like her,"

said the trapper. "Yes, in the big city, in New York, maybe, you see no girl so beautiful as Marie. Is that not so, mister? You know. You see plenty of girls."

"There is a girl in New York who is as beautiful as Marie Benoit, but she is not a dark beauty," replied Westley, smiling grimly.

Pierre looked at him sharply.

"That must be your own girl, mister, if you think her as beautiful as Marie," he said.

Westley laughed and shook his head.

"I have no girl," he said.

"That too bad," returned Pierre. And then: "Marie think she marry me some day, maybe. That pretty fine thing for poor trapper like me, to marry a girl like Marie, the prettiest girl in this province."

"Yes, that would be a fine thing," agreed the other absently. He was thinking of Dorothy Gordon as he had last seen her. His heart shook suddenly and seemed to falter. He halted in the narrow path, staggered, recovered himself with a laugh. Pierre caught hold of him.

"You weak," he cried. "You work too hard on the trip up river."

"No, I am all right. I twisted my ankle," replied Westley.

The two spent the afternoon at work on the interior of Westley's cabin. Marie came in for half an hour and helped them hang moose-hides on the walls.

The little settlement was almost empty, save for the women and children, for most of the men had gone to their trapping-grounds several weeks before.

The children scouted about the open door of the stranger's cabin, gazing in with round eyes whenever his back was turned. Pierre bought lamps and oil at the store, and by sunset the little house was ready for occupation. Then Westley remembered that he had accepted the factor's invitation to dinner. Pierre went home with Marie, but soon returned to the newly furnished cabin. He sat by the new stove, and smoked, and talked while Westley changed into a decent suit of dark-gray tweeds.

"Steve Canadian keep away from the post all day," said Pierre. "You scare him pretty good last night, you bet. I tell Marie how you talk to him, an' she laugh an' say you must be very brave man—as brave as you are big. She mighty glad you scare that feller."

"If he troubled her while you were away why didn't her father send him about his business? She has a father, hasn't she?" asked Westley.

"Oh, yes, she got a father, by name Dominic Benoit," replied the other, smiling. "Dominic once was a mighty smart feller, an' great man in the company—great feller to get fur—but now he don't give one little darn for nothin' but his rum, an' his 'baccy, an' his fiddle. He got 'nough money put away safe, but he don't

know Injun from white man, nor bad Injun from good."

Westley went to dinner at the factor's house. Mr. Duff, the storekeeper, was also there. The table was set at one end of a long, bare room, close to a wide hearth whereon logs of maple and birch blazed furiously. The night was cold.

The dinner passed off uneventfully, but there were many things about it, and about the quiet evening which followed, that impressed Westley deeply and awakened his curiosity.

To begin with, the dinner itself was astonishingly good, and well cooked. The half-breed lad who waited on the table wore a shabby livery half a size too large for him. But he did his work neatly and swiftly. While a few of the dishes on the table were of the commonest kind, and some even cracked and chipped, most of the ware was fine and old, and all the spoons and forks were of silver, engraved with the crest of the company.

The dinner was as dignified as it was savory, despite the incongruous note struck by the half-dozen cracked, earthenware platters.

The company seemed to Westley more curious than the table. Mr. Grant, seated in a huge armchair at the head of the table, ate no more than would have satisfied a healthy sparrow, and drank enough to float a canoe. His manner was perfect, though a trifle too quiet

and detached. He had dressed for the meal in a shabby and wrinkled suit of evening clothes. He had not combed his beard, however, nor brushed his hair. On the wide, silk facing of his coat was a row of little black loops, three in number. Westley's keen eyes soon detected these loops. Mr. Duff wore Sunday black, a high collar, of a shape fashionable fifteen years before, and a sky-blue necktie.

Mr. Duff drank little and ate much. He told several stories, in a humorous vein, of his last visit to Montreal. He had spent a month in that city, and a great deal of money, as recently as eight years ago.

"Nothin' like a trip out every now and then, and a fling in the life of a big city, to brisk a man up and keep him in touch with the world," said Mr. Duff complacently.

When the coffee came on, and cigarettes and cigars were lighted, Westley leaned sidewise toward the factor.

"You have been in the army," he said.

The factor started slightly in his big chair, and his blue eyes darkened a little in the candlelight. The storekeeper kicked Westley furtively but sharply on the shin, winked, and shook his head.

"Why, so I was," said the factor; "but how did you know?"

Westley did not reply. He stared at the store-

keeper puzzlingly. What had that fat idiot kicked him for, he wondered.

"How do you know I was ever in the service?" asked Grant sharply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," returned Westley. "How did I know? Why, by the loops for the miniature medals on the front of your coat."

"Sure enough," said the factor. "By the loops, of course."

A look of relief flashed and faded swiftly from his face. He sagged back in his seat again and returned his cigar to his mouth. David glanced inquiringly at Duff, and again the storekeeper shook his head.

The remainder of the evening passed pleasantly, though somewhat dully, with no further mention by any one of the fact that Mr. Grant had been in the army. It was after midnight when Westley went home to his newly furnished cabin. Snow was falling thickly from a pitch-black sky.

When Westley awoke he found the fire burning in the new stove and Pierre MacKim standing beside his bed.

"You got some letters to go out, maybe?" queried Pierre. "You write them to-day, mister, an' I take them out early to-morrow mornin'. We have plenty snow now; an' I run the mail between here an' St. Anne's one time in every two weeks. Grant, he give me the

job this mornin'. I have it last winter, too, an' never miss one trip. I wear this big badge now—G. R., His Majesty's Mails, Dominion of Canada. I get good money, too; an' plenty time to trap a little; an' if any dirty Injun trouble me when I run with the mail the whole English army, an' the whole Canada militia, too, have to turn out an' protect me."

"You are no end of a swell," said Westley, smiling. And then, "I won't have any letter to send out this time, Pierre, thanks all the same. I wrote to New York from St. Anne's."

"Maybe I bring in one letter to you, then," replied Pierre. "One letter from that girl you say more beautiful nor Marie Benoit."

"Don't talk like that," returned Westley, not unkindly. "There is no girl and no chance of a letter."

Westley spent the day in wandering about the post, oiling his guns and talking to the storekeeper. Mr. Duff was willing to talk on any and every subject save the factor. Whenever Westley mentioned the factor Duff gave a turn to the conversation.

He talked of the country, praising it highly. He explained how great things could be done with the wilderness around the post—greater things than the taking of furs. He spoke, at length, of lumbering and agriculture.

"If I had money—a heap of it—I'd buy up

about twenty square miles of this country and make my everlasting fortune," he said.

"Why isn't it done?" asked Westley, mildly interested.

"The company isn't in that business, as yet," replied Duff. "It is old-fashioned, you know. The river is a bad one for driving out lumber—has half a dozen rapids and falls between here and St. Anne's that need a lot of blasting.

"The big lumbermen don't seem to know about the timber up this way. But mind you, Mr. Westley, timber isn't the only thing to work with up here. We have a cold, long winter up here—but we also have a hot, five-month summer. I have raised grain and potatoes in my garden that can't be beat. This is a fine country, under the timber and the moss."

"Who is the owner?" asked Westley.

Duff stared. "The company owns a bit of it around the post here," he said. "Just a block or two—a thousand acres or so, all told. The bulk of the country is crown land, of course—government land. The stumpage on some of it may be leased by lumbermen, for all I know; but the land is crown land. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I have a little money to invest," replied Westley, "and the woods appeal to me."

"How much?" grabbing the New Yorker's shoulder.

"How much would I require to collar and de-

velop about ten thousand acres of this country?" queried Westley in return.

At that moment the door of the store was pushed open, and Steve Canadian entered, his shoulders and fur cap flecked with snow. He carried snowshoes in one hand and a rifle in the other. He looked at Westley and grinned insolently. Westley returned the look steadily. The Indian's eyes wavered.

"I'll come over and talk to you to-night, Mr. Westley," said Duff.

Steve Canadian bought some cartridges and tobacco.

David Westley went home to his little shack, lit a pipe, and sat by the stove. He was lonely and heart-sick.

"If I had only known a year ago that she did not love me," he said. "It would have been easier then. I must jump into some sort of work or excitement quick, or I'll be sneaking back to her and crawling before her like a dog. I must get over it—tear it out!"

Duff came in the evening and talked largely of lands and lumber and agriculture. He was a man of big ideas—big dreams. His talk interested Westley. The bigness of it caught his fancy. He could understand that this wilderness was not to be tamed without toil, excitement, and endless trouble. He was looking for these things. He told Duff that he would think

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over the idea of developing a block of this northern forest.

Early in the morning Pierre MacKim set out for St. Anne's with snowshoes on his feet, a rifle in his hand, and mail and food in a pack on his back. David accompanied him for about five miles of the way. Coming to a fresh moose-track, David followed it away from the river.

After an hour's trailing he came in sight of the animal; but as it proved to be only a young bull, with inferior antlers, he did not shoot. He "cruised" a few miles of the country, examining the timber and the slopes of hills and valleys, and got back to the post shortly before noon. He found the place in a hubbub. Rosie MacKim's little granddaughter was missing! Every one was in the open, asking questions or making suggestions. Even Donald Grant, the factor, was out on the steps of his big house, cigar in hand.

"She has wander away!" cried the distracted Rosie. "My God, the wild beasts of the forest —they will eat her! I don't know when she go —but maybe when I was busy cooking."

"I think it will be easy enough to track her," said Westley.

He immediately made up a search-party of all who were able and willing to go into the woods. The party consisted of Mr. Duff and

his two Indian assistants at the store, of a servant from the factor's house, the factor himself, Marie Benoit, and Westley.

Westley was uncomfortably hungry, for he had breakfasted at six; but he said nothing about that. There were already many trails in the snow of the big clearing, running here and there and everywhere. Many of these entered the forest, and some led down to the river and across it to the black woods beyond. The searchers separated and entered the forest singly, examining the snow at every step for the foot-marks of the little girl.

David went down to the river and across it. He pushed forward straight for about half a mile from the farther shore, then swung to the left. There were no tracks here save those of hare, partridge, and larger game. He came around again, slanting back to his own trail. The "going" was hard in places, through tangles of brush and drifts of feathery snow. He crossed his trail and kept on to the right. At last he came upon a deep, well-beaten track, along which a herd of caribou had moved recently. He slipped his rifle from its woollen case; then shook his head and returned it to its cover. He was not after caribou, but after a little girl. He stepped into the track and followed it. The big, splay hoofs had trampled it

deep and hard. He calculated that as many as fifty animals must have passed along it in Indian file.

"If the others quarter the ground as I have done, she'll be found," he reflected.

Suddenly he stooped with a low cry and picked up a scrap of silver foil from the trampled snow. He had opened a tin of cigarettes at Rosie MacKim's cabin, and had given the silver wrapper to the little girl. She had asked for it. It had looked like a treasure to her.

"And it has proved a thing of price to her," said David.

He shouted, then stood motionless and gave ear; and from far ahead came a faint and broken cry in answer.

"The poor little kid!" he muttered. "She must be frightened almost to death."

He dropped his rifle in the snow and began to run along the narrow trail. As he ran he shouted words of cheer; and presently, bursting through a screen of drooping branches, he came in sight of the baby. She stood in the trail, facing him, with tears rolling down her fat cheeks and others frozen on her lashes. She started to run to him, but fell and lay still.

Westley had a flask in his pocket. He lifted the little girl in his arms and coaxed a drop or two of the whisky between her trembling lips. She shivered with fright, relief, and cold. Sobs

shook her little body. Westley felt a great pity and tenderness in his heart. He tried to comfort her, and presently he succeeded in this.

"Now I'll carry you home to your grandmother," he said. "You'll ride all the way home. Won't that be fun? But you are cold. I must roll you up in my jumper."

The sobbing ceased. Westley took off his short blanket-coat and folded it around the little girl. He took a nip of whisky then to comfort his empty stomach, and lifted her in his arms again. She lay there quietly as he strode along. She was heavy for her age and size, and his arms soon began to ache. But he kept right on.

"Why did you run away and lose yourself in the woods?" he asked.

"I want to see the fairies," she said. "Monsieur Grant, he tell me one day 'bout little fairies in the big wood. I think I go an' see—an' I run 'cross the river—and then I don't know. All woods, woods everywhere—an' I don't see the fairy. Then I get scare—an' I cry a little."

"Will you promise me not to go looking for the fairies again until you are a big girl?" he asked gravely and tenderly.

"Yes, I promise you, *monsieur*," she whispered. "But *monsieur* the factor, he tell me how only little children see the fairies. But I promise you, *monsieur*—'cause I love you."

"Good!" said David Westley, and he kissed Rosie MacKim's four-year-old granddaughter.

He had to put her down several times before he reached the river to fling his arms about and rub the kinks out of them. And he felt weak and empty beneath the belt.

On reaching the bank of the river opposite the post he fired his rifle three times to let the other seachers know that he had been successful. Twenty minutes later he staggered into the big clearing and placed the child in the arms of her grandmother. Old Rosie MacKim was loud in her gratitude and praise. Westley submitted to a close embrace, then escaped to his lonely shack and cooked himself a lonely dinner. He was dog-tired, but the thing had done him good. His spirit felt quieter and his nerves less raw than they had for weeks. The child's words of trust and love sang in his ears, and the grandmother's sincere and broken blessings.

Duff paid Westley a visit and remained to supper. He congratulated the New Yorker on his deed of the morning.

"That sort of thing is what gets right down to the hearts of these people," he said. "If poor old Grant had found the baby and carried her home—though I doubt if he could have lugged her all the way—his trade in peltries would have gone up fifty per cent. Yes, sir, as quick as that—fifty per cent. Every trapper in the

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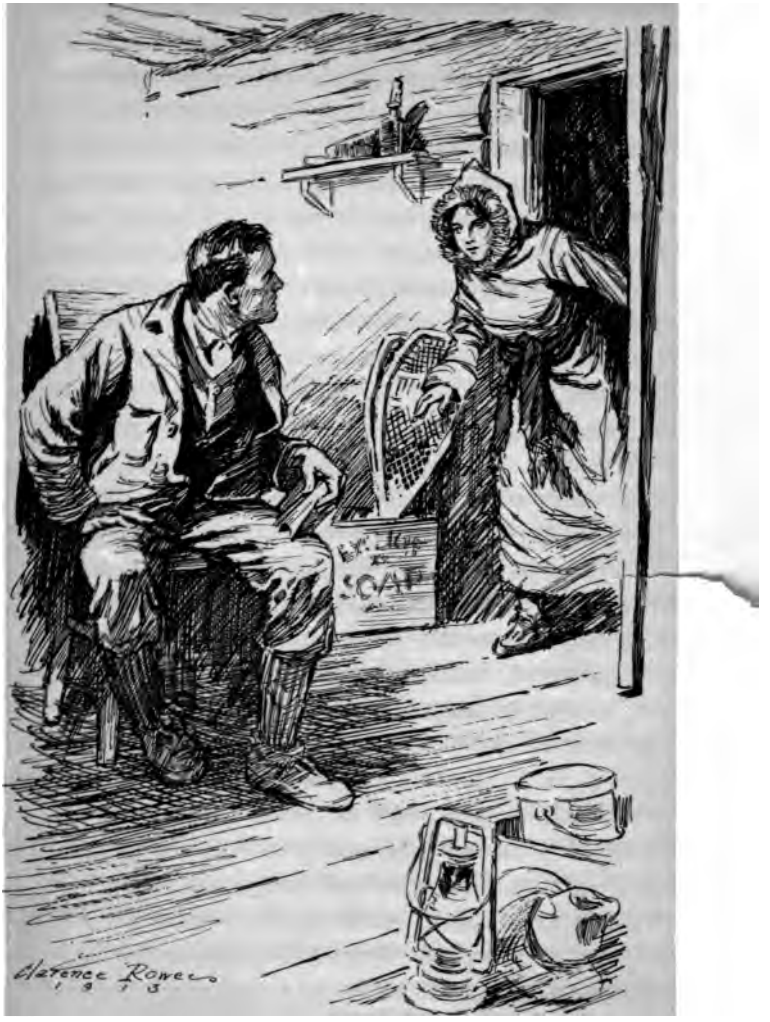

Marie Benoit appeared on the threshold.
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country would have brought his whole take into this post. But Grant wasn't the lucky man, and you were. Well, sir, you're made, as far as this country and these people are concerned."

Duff left early, for he was posting his books over at the store. Westley tried to read, and soon dozed in his chair. It was about ten o'clock when a sound at the door awakened him. The door was flung open, and Marie Benoit appeared on the threshold. A puff of icy wind leaped past her and extinguished the lamp. She screamed. Westley jumped to his feet and stumbled toward her.

"What is the matter?" he cried.

She clutched his arm. She was trembling with fear or excitement. She shrank close to him, pressing a quaking shoulder against his arm.

"It is Steve Canadian," she whispered, holding him tight with both small, ungloved hands. "He is in the house with my poor father—who is drunk. Oh, *monsieur,* he defies my father—he will not go from the house—and—and he kissed me, *monsieur!* He now makes ready to fight with my poor father."

The blood pulsed up hotly through Westley's veins.

"Come," he said, "I'll rid your house of him."

He felt no particular anger against the Indian now, but a thirst for excitement. The fact

is, he had been awakened from a vague but wonderful dream of Dorothy Gordon. All this had been a mistake—in the dream; and now to find it true! He had been with Dorothy a moment ago—and now the little hands of Marie Benoit grasped his arm! It struck him as a huge and bitter joke.

He laughed recklessly and laid his hands upon hers to free them from his sleeve. She was sobbing now, softly and pitifully. Her fingers turned in his, warm and soft and wonderfully alive.

"You are Pierre's girl, Marie—and I have no girl," he said. "That is hard luck, don't you think so?"

The blood sang in his brain like a madness. He slipped his arm around Marie's waist and kissed her full on the upturned lips. She did not struggle or cry out. A sudden, hot shame flooded through him. He freed her almost violently and ran from his own cabin toward that of Dominic Benoit.

CHAPTER VI

TWENTY THOUSAND ACRES

David Westley kicked open the door of Dominic's cabin without ceremony. For a moment he stood blinking on the threshold, his inner vision clouded by the reckless, daredevil madness that was awake in him, his eyes bewildered by the light of two candles and a lamp.

Then he saw the Frenchman and Steve Canadian staring at him. He took in the scene and its meaning at a glance. A chair lay overturned on the floor. Dominic Benoit stood leaning against the edge of the table, clinging to the edge of it, his long, white hair straggled over his face.

The Indian sat on a corner of the table, a broken fiddle in his left hand and a knife bared in his right. His teeth were bared also, and his eyes were glowing.

"Ha," exclaimed Steve. "Marie get one big champion."

"Drop that knife and go away from here," said Westley, advancing.

The Indian sneered and lowered his feet to

the floor. He was none too steady on them. He threw the fiddle aside and brandished the knife.

"You ain't boss in dis post, my boy," he said. "No, I guess not. Grant, he factor of Two Moose. You go 'way an' mind yer own business—an' nurse Pierre MacKim. He yer baby, I guess."

The mention of Pierre turned Westley's bewilderment into a flaming rage against the Indian and a scorching disgust of himself. How had he treated Pierre? Bah—and he considered himself a civilized man—and a gentleman.

And yet, what had he done? A kiss—one kiss, more or less, would hurt neither Marie nor Pierre. He had been treated badly, disgracefully, by a woman of his own kind.

After all, what harm had he done—so long as Marie did not mind? It had been done impulsively, in a moment of excitement and pity. It had meant nothing to the girl, and would mean nothing to Pierre.

These things went through his mind while he stood motionless, with the open door behind him, staring blankly at Steve Canadian.

"I guess you better go home," sneered Steve. "You t'ink so, too. You not like the look of dis knife, maybe. You ain't such one devil of a feller as you try to make out, I guess. Big voice—nothing else."

Westley sighed, then jumped forward with amazing swiftness and landed his left fist on the side of Steve Canadian's jaw.

The Indian grunted and dropped.

Dominic swore in the tongue of his fathers and subsided across the table, overturning one of the candles.

A figure darted forward from the door, brushing against Westley. It was Marie.

She picked up the candle and set it upright in its stick. She turned to Westley, her eyes very bright and wide, her cheeks flaming.

"Oh, *monsieur,* you are so brave," she whispered. "The knife give you no fear. You save my poor father from death, yes."

Westley looked away from her to the man on the floor.

"I'll attend to this fellow," he said gruffly, "and you had better look after your father. He will kill himself if he doesn't let up on the drink a bit—or else he'll get killed by some fellow like this."

He stooped, lifted Steve Canadian, and carried him from the cabin. He laid him on the floor of his own cabin, shut and fastened the door, and lit the lamp on the table. He examined the Indian and found that he was breathing heavily and regularly.

"I knew I didn't hit him hard," he said. "The brandy did the job."

He put more wood into the stove and sat down with his elbows on the table and his head between his hands. Steve Canadian opened his eyes after a while and hoisted himself on his elbow. He saw the New Yorker at the table bowed forward in an attitude of dejection or sleep.

The Indian mistook it for sleep. He felt in his belt for his knife, recollecting, mistily, the incidents of the evening; but the knife was not there.

His wandering red eyes detected a rifle in a corner at the farther end of the room. His head swam from the brandy and the knock on the jaw; but his heart was firm.

He got slowly to his knees, then unsteadily but noiselessly to his moccasined feet, and started cautiously toward the rifle. He had not gone more than two yards when Westley raised his head from his hands.

Steve Canadian came to a full stop.

"So you are feeling better," said Westley. "Well, I hope you have learned a lesson to-night. Next time I'll hit you harder."

Steve scowled sullenly at the caribou hide under his feet.

"Now get out," continued Westley; "but if you go back to Benoit's cabin I'll knock your dirty head off. Do you understand what I say?"

"Sure, I hear," replied Steve. "Who you t'ink you are, anyhow?"

"It doesn't concern you. Get out—quick," returned the other.

Steve took his departure snarling, and banged the door after him.

David went to the factor's house immediately after breakfast. The snow was deep on the ground and the roofs of the cabins, and the air was clear and nipping cold.

Westley found Mr. Grant in his living-room, wearing a shabby dressing-gown and seated at the cluttered table. The room smelled of stale cigar-smoke. The dogs still lay on the rug in front of the stove.

Grant pushed back his chair, got to his feet, and held out his hand.

"Good morning," he said. "Sit down."

"You were busy," said Westley. "I am sorry to disturb you; but I'll not bother you long. I just called to say that a man here named Steve Canadian requires watching. He kicked up a row last night in Benoit's cabin—refused to leave the house, and pulled his knife on the old man. They had both taken too much liquor."

The factor sighed and frowned.

"That Indian is inclined to be lawless and lazy, I am afraid," he replied; "but he has never done any real harm yet, around here. Of course, if he did serious damage I'd soon

send him packing. He has been here only a few weeks. He doesn't belong to this part of the country, I'm glad to say."

"The girl—Dominic's daughter—came to me for help," said David. "I found Steve with a knife in his hand and the Frenchman quite helplessly drunk. I was forced to knock the Indian down and drag him out."

Mr. Grant raised his eyebrows.

"Really?" he said. He smiled quietly. "A girl like Marie—a pretty girl—causes more trouble in the woods than a dozen fellows like the Indian you speak of."

"You may be right," returned Westley crisply. "You know more about it than I do, of course. If the Indian, Steve Canadian, is not a menace to the peace of your post I suppose I need not worry my head about him. Mr. Duff does not fancy him any more than I do."

"Duff is an old woman," said the factor. "He's afraid the Indian will pinch a spool of thread or a tin of sardines from the store."

"Good morning. Sorry to have bothered you," said Westley.

"Don't go, please. I'm not doing anything very important," said the factor.

Westley felt a trifle huffy, however, and would not stay another minute.

Westley went to the store and found Mr. Duff

dozing beside the stove, with his pipe in the corner of his mouth.

"Steve Canadian was in here this morning," said Duff, hitching his chair across to his visitor and reseating himself on a bag of flour.

"He is a bad egg—and dangerous, too. He has it in for you, Mr. Westley—and hasn't sense enough to keep it to himself. He says he'll cut out your liver before you leave this country. I warned him against talk of that kind. The factor may stand for it, but I won't."

Westley laughed. "That fellow is about as dangerous as a cat," he said. "Twenty like him couldn't scare me a minute. As to cutting out my useful liver before I leave this country—well, Duff, I have an idea that he will leave the country before I do."

Mr. Duff brightened at that and removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Now what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I've decided to take up a bunch of this wilderness," replied the New Yorker. "I need work; and I think it would be interesting to make something worth while—a green spot on the map—out of raw material."

Duff sprang to his feet and grasped his hand.

"That's the way to talk," he exclaimed. And then, more quietly, "You can raise the wind, can you—a pretty stiff breeze?"

Westley nodded. "What shall I have to pay for the land, just as it stands?" he asked. "About how much per acre?"

"It will average about four dollars an acre, taking it front and back, timber and barren, valley and hill," replied Duff, his eyes glistening. "How much can you buy?"

Westley lit a cigarette and began figuring on the back of an envelope. Duff left the bag of flour and hung over his shoulder.

"I want enough to keep me busy and interested," said Westley. "How would twenty thousand acres do? I don't want to play at the thing."

"Man, that would be eighty thousand dollars," exclaimed Duff. "You must be made of money, Mr. Westley. Twenty thousand acres! Bless my soul!"

"But would you have anything left for the work of developing? That will cost a good deal more than the land, sir, though you'd soon be getting returns from your lumber. How much have you?"

"I am willing to spend five hundred thousand on this—for a starter," returned Westley. "The river will have to be cleared next summer; and we must have a mill of our own, up here; and if we can get a crew of men together we had better start cutting lumber this winter."

Duff was silent for half a minute, staring.

"Man, what ever brought you into the Smoky River country—you, with your five hundred thousands of dollars?" he asked.

"Man, you could own a place in Scotland! Are you joking with me, sir?"

"Not on your life," replied Westley, smiling faintly. "This country suits my book; and it suits my book to have a job—an exciting job. I want to make something out of new land—out of raw material."

The storekeeper eyed him keenly.

"Something has gone wrong with you in New York," he said.

Westley frowned and did not reply.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Duff. "I am not thinking of asking any questions of a private nature. You'll be needing a lot of help, Mr. Westley, if you want to make a success of this. Will you take me on, sir, as a secretary and assistant manager—or something of the kind?

"I know the country—and I'm about sick of dozing here in this store and waiting for promotion. I don't want big wages, but I do want big work. Say the word, sir, and I'll hand in my resignation to Grant this very day."

"That suits me," said Westley. "Leave your boy in charge here and come over to my shack.

I want to get right down to business. We'll have a bagful of mail ready for Pierre on his next trip out."

Duff knocked the ashes from his pipe in a dazed manner. He went to the back of the store, called his Indian lad, gave him some orders, and then followed Westley from the store.

They went first to Duff's cabin, where they obtained a Government survey map of the country, drawn on a large scale, and amplified and elaborated by Duff himself, and a quantity of paper and envelopes.

With these they waded through the snow to Westley's shack; and the first piece of business attended to was the writing of the storekeeper's resignation.

"I'll take this right over to the factor," said Duff. "No use in beating about the bush. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Duff found his chief at the writing-table, leaning back in his chair, with a far-away look in his mild eyes. He placed the paper on the manuscript in front of him, wide open. The factor took it up, read it, and puckered his brow.

"Does this mean that you are leaving the company's service?" he asked.

"That's what it means, sir," replied Duff. "I've got a new job with Mr. Westley—a job that will keep me busy."

He outlined it briefly to the factor.

"Madness," said Mr. Grant. "Stark madness. What do you know of this David Westley? He may be a rogue, or he may be a fool, for all you know to the contrary.

"Why, Duff, you never heard his name before he came here. You know nothing of his past—and he may not be worth a red cent. He blows in here, from down river, and you swallow him."

"I am a fair judge of men," replied Duff. "But for that matter, sir, what do I know of your past? You blew in on me, right in this post, seven years ago, and you've never told me anything of your past from that day to this.

"Fact is, you have always seemed to keep clear of any mention of your past. And yet I've never held that against you. I could see for myself that you were honest."

The factor flushed. "I came here as the factor—as an officer of the company," he retorted.

"That's right," said Duff. "Well, here's my resignation, anyway. I am going in with this Westley, whether you approve of the move or not."

"Good luck to you," replied Grant, pushing the resignation to one side, and taking up his pen.

Duff returned to Westley, and they immediately got down to business.

Westley saw nothing of Marie or of Steve Canadian that day. He went to bed early, and slept soundly.

He was early astir in the morning, cooked and ate his breakfast by lamplight, and then dressed for a day in the open. He and Duff were to do a day's "cruising" in the woods. Duff arrived before the sun was up, with snowshoes and knapsack, ax and rifle.

It was several hours after sunset when they got back to the post, weary, but well satisfied with the day's work. They ate supper in Westley's cabin; after which Duff went to his own quarters, and David fell asleep in his chair before the stove.

It was broad daylight when he was awakened by a knocking at his door. He stumbled across the room on stiff and aching legs, turned the key in the lock, and opened the door. Pierre MacKim stepped across the threshold and grasped his hand.

"I get back this mornin'," said Pierre. "I see Marie already, and she tell me how you help her—how you put Steve Canadian out of the house. That was mighty fine, mister. Yes, that was good."

"Oh, that was nothing," replied Westley in a somewhat uncertain tone of voice. "Steve isn't

dangerous. But come in and sit down, Pierre, and tell me all about your trip. You found it heavy tramping, I'll swear."

"Pretty heavy, yes," said Pierre. "No sport an' no excitement. I see one big bull moose; but he travel too fast. St. Anne's mighty slow little village—worse nor the woods. I got three letters for you this time."

He drew three letters from his pocket, and placed them on the table.

"The factor, he stamp them all right, this mornin', an' I fetch them right over to you. Grant, he postmaster here," said Pierre.

Westley felt a tightening at his throat, a beating of blood in his temples, a sudden and brief dimness of the eyes, as he took up the letters. His hand trembled, and his face reddened. He felt Pierre's keen, curious, yet half-shy glance upon him.

"Thank you, Pierre," he said, quietly. "They are not of much importance, these letters."

"They look like that to me, too," said Pierre. "They don't look like anything you expect very bad."

"My dear fellow, I am not expecting anything," returned Westley.

"I get breakfast now, mister, an' you read the letters," returned Pierre. "Coffee an' bacon, yes. I ain't et anything yet myself."

Westley opened the three envelopes. Two

contained bills, and the third a brief communication from Hush.

The valet's letter was as follows:

DEAR SIR:

Your letter from St. Anne's to hand and instructions noted. In accordance with those instructions, I have refused Captain Joice your address, and have respectfully informed him that I shall be delighted to forward to you any letter he may wish to send.

By this post I forward two letters which look like bills. You left me no instructions as to bills, sir; but if you wish me to settle these, from funds in hand, kindly return them by next post. The house is in good order, sir.

Your uncle, Mr. Peter Westley, called to see you yesterday. He was sorry not to find you at home and seemed a trifle ruffled in his temper when he failed to obtain your present address. The horses in town and in the country are doing well, sir. I am in good health. I should enjoy being in the woods with you, sir.

I am, sir, your faithful servant,

JAMES HUSH.

"Now, what the deuce does Joice want of my address?" reflected Westley. "He wants to write to me, evidently; which is a new thing. We have never exchanged as much as a line in the past—so what's biting him now?" He smiled bitterly.

"I think I can guess. Joice is an honest man,

and of course wants to let me know exactly how the land lies, and to give me fair warning of his intentions. Well, it is happening sooner than I expected; but it is none of my business —now.

"She is free, Heaven knows—as far as I am concerned. There is nothing for him to write about to me, the poor fool.

"Surely I was frank enough with her. Perhaps the next post will bring me a letter from her, though I hope not. The miserable affair is at an end; and the less said, the sooner mended. Doubtless I lost my temper, but I cleaned the business up, anyway, and gave her her liberty, and there it ends."

"You get one letter that make you think a heap," said Pierre, glancing up from the pan in which he was frying bacon.

"Yes, a letter from a—friend of mine, a man named Hush. He is a good fellow, James Hush," replied Westley.

"You have plenty of good friends, mister, an' plenty of enemies, I guess," said Pierre, simply. "You make friends quick—an' enemy too. You make good friend of me first minute you see me; an' Marie, she say you are one mighty fine hero.

"But you make enemy of Steve Canadian in one minute. That's all right. Steve Canadian don't count for nothin'. You make honest man

yer friend, an' bad man yer enemy. You mighty honest man yerself, mister."

David looked at the woodsman, and away again.

"I am no hero, Pierre," he said, "and still less a saint."

"You mighty good man, anyhow," returned Pierre, with conviction.

Westley put the letters in his inner pocket and then asked:

"When do you start back for St. Anne's?"

"Not to-morrow. The mornin' after to-morrow," answered the runner.

"Mr. Duff and I will have a big bunch of letters for you to take out," said Westley. "We are going into business in this country."

He told Pierre his plans for buying land and developing the country. Pierre was astonished and delighted.

"You give me job, too, maybe," he said. "I got to carry mails all winter; but I find you plenty of men for the lumber, all the same. Trappin' not so good now'days, an' mighty hard work. You live here? I know you like this country mighty well, mister."

"Yes, it's a fine country; and I'll give you a good job the minute you want it, Pierre," replied Westley.

Duff came over, and he and Westley worked and talked until noon.

Pierre spent the morning at Dominic's cabin. After dinner the three entered the woods behind the post, spying out the land. They found some bunches of splendid pine beyond the company's holdings.

David shot a moose; and they all returned before the green and red of sunset had faded from the western sky.

The first person they met in the big clearing was Steve Canadian. He did not speak to them, but laughed shrilly as he passed them, and entered the timber. It was quite evident that he had been drinking again.

"I wonder where the fellow goes to," said Westley. "He vanishes for a day or two, and then turns up again. He must have a hiding-place within easy reach of the post."

"We'll smoke him out, sooner or later, if he is on your land, Mr. Westley," said Duff.

"I guess so," said Pierre. "I think maybe I follow him some day."

CHAPTER VII

A LETTER IS BURNED

As they reached Dominic Benoit's cabin, the door opened, letting out Marie, and a gush of warmth and lamplight. The young woman paused uncertainly within a few yards of them.

Westley and Duff halted, and Pierre advanced. Pierre caught her hands in both of his; but she pulled them away.

"What the trouble, now?" asked Pierre. "You gettin' almighty shy."

The girl's bright eyes looked past him to Westley.

"My father got grand new fiddle now," she said. "You hear him play now, happy as a baby. Steve Canadian open the door a little while ago, an' throw it in, an' not say a word. He break my father's old fiddle, *monsieur*, that night you save my poor father's life."

Westley and Duff exchanged glances. Pierre seized the girl's wrist.

"I don't stand for that," exclaimed Pierre. "No, by thunder! I will give Dominic one new fiddle, an' he smash that one Steve give him.

Yes, I get him grand new fiddle down to St. Anne's nex' trip. I won't stand to have him play on the fiddle Steve Canadian give him."

"Oh, Pierre, you my father's guardian, maybe?" returned Marie. "I think my father do what he want to, whatever you say, Pierre. You never save his life. You never drive Steve Canadian out of the house. Steve Canadian own the whole post, for all you do to him."

Pierre stared at the girl in astonishment, then looked around at the other men with a puzzled, pained expression on his thin face. Duff laughed. Westley smiled at the trapper.

"You must not try to run things too soon, Pierre," said Westley. "That's a mistake that wiser men have made before this. I don't know what your authority is, but you may take my word for it that it isn't all that you think. Better go slow until you are married."

"Married?" queried the girl. "Oh, *monsieur,* I never say yet that I will marry Pierre MacKim. He say so plenty times; but not me. I just laugh an' say p'raps. Pierre say it many an' many a time. I like Pierre very much, yes. He is very nice boy; except when he try to boss me."

Pierre had nothing to say. He looked as if he had been hit with a sand-bag. Duff laughed and nudged Westley's arm.

"Come along home," he said. "We can't stand

and freeze here. Let them fight it out by themselves—or with the help of papa and his new fiddle, if they like it better. We'll learn nothing new by waiting. Women are pretty much the same in the woods and in the cities."

So Duff and Westley passed on their way, leaving Marie and Pierre standing face to face, the girl laughing merrily, the lover frowning and expostulating.

Pierre came to Westley's cabin late that night. He looked worried and sheepish.

"I don't know what the trouble with Marie," he said, dangling his heavy fur cap between his long fingers. "She laugh at me; and Dominic laugh too. Dominic Benoit what I call one fool, anyhow—drunk all the time, an' do nothin' but play on the fiddle.

"But why does Marie laugh at me? She don't like that Steve Canadian, I know. She hate him like she hate skunk. I think she like me—I think she love me; but now she laugh at me."

"Women—plenty of women—behave like that," said Westley. "There is no harm in laughter, Pierre. You had better go about your business and let her laugh. It is better that she laughs at you to your face than behind your back. Very likely she is fond of you, and intends to marry you; but don't feel too sure of it until it happens."

"I guess some woman make a fool of you,

maybe," said Pierre, artlessly. "An' you get mad, just like me. But I guess your girl really love you; an' you pretty soon get over bein' mad at her.

"But this Marie—well, she just laugh—an' one minute she loves me an' one minute she don't. If I run away into the woods, like you —well, she laugh some more, an' think it mighty good joke. I guess your girl don't laugh at you all the time, mister."

Westley laid down his pen, flushed darkly, and frowned.

"What have I ever said to you to lead you to think that I have been treated badly by a woman; or ever cared for a woman?" he asked.

Pierre looked frightened and uncomfortable.

"You never say it, mister," he replied, "but —but you look that way to me, sometime— mighty sore an' mad. I don't know what else but some girl make you so sore, an' send you up into this country."

"I came into this country on business, and the sport," said Westley, "and if I look sore sometimes, Pierre, it is the way my face is made. You talk as if I had a devilish bad temper, and never did anything but growl and bite."

"I don't mean that," returned Pierre, anxiously. "You mighty kind, an' treat me good. I don't mean you go round cussin' folk, but I mean you don't look happy all the time.

"I like you, mister, an' think you the finest man I ever see—an' mighty brave. I don't want to make you mad; for I guess if you get real mad at a feller you stay mad a long time."

Westley laughed good-naturedly.

"I am not angry with you, Pierre," he said, heartily. "I am glad you think I am brave, and I hope you are not mistaken. I don't mind telling you that I am not such a fine fellow as you think, nor quite such a fool as you think.

"I used to be a fool, but that is neither here nor there. Don't try inventing silly stories about me; and when I look sore put it down to a bad breakfast, poor sport, or business cares.

"Remember these things, Pierre, and we'll never fall out, if I can help it. And don't worry too much about Marie. You take her laughter too seriously. She'll stop it when she finds she has nothing to laugh about."

The next day passed uneventfully. Steve Canadian did not appear.

Before sun-up of the following morning Pierre MacKim set out on his second trip to St. Anne's this time with a fine bunch of letters from David Westley. All these were business letters, save one to Mr. James Hush.

The day was clear and cold and windless. Pierre left the post in high spirits, for Marie had only laughed at him once during the previous evening, and had promised to accept

a new fiddle for her father, and to destroy the one presented by the Indian. Also, Westley had promised to keep his eye open for the unwelcome suitor, and to run him out of the post if he tried to force his attentions upon Marie.

David called on the factor early in the afternoon. He was interested in Grant, and he wanted to keep on friendly terms with him. He was wise enough to see that, no matter how hard he worked in the wilderness, he would often be glad of the society of a man who had seen the outside world even as he had seen it himself.

Grant was a queer stick, but a man of education and breeding, beyond a doubt. And again it would be well to keep on friendly terms with him as the factor of the post.

For the sake of his venture, if for nothing else, he did not want to buck against the old H. B. C. So he shoved a couple of new books into his pockets, and called on Grant. He found the factor at his cluttered table, pen in hand.

"You are the busiest man I know," said Westley, accepting a cigar.

"Well, a man must work at something in this God-forsaken hole," replied Grant, "even if the thing he does isn't worth doing. The business of the post does not amount to enough to keep me awake—even without Duff—at this time of year.

"Of course we have to hustle a bit when the trappers come out of the woods, and again to outfit them for the winter's work. But I hear from Duff that you are contemplating a venture in this country?"

Westley admitted it; and for several minutes they talked of the chances of developing the country without dropping a fortune. Grant was of the opinion that it could not be done; but he admitted, at the same time, that he knew nothing about it.

"I don't like the country," he said. "I know a little about the fur trade, and that is all. You may be right about the timber, but your idea that this country can be farmed seems madness to me."

"Duff has kept a record of sunshine and frost for the past seven years," replied Westley, "and that is what I am going by. Has he ever shown you his record? It is interesting and enlightening."

Grant shook his head. "I am afraid I have shown no more interest in Duff's records of frost and sunshine than he had displayed in this foolish occupation of mine."

He smiled mournfully, and waved his cigar above the scattered pages of manuscript on the table in front of him.

"That looks interesting to me—but I haven't

the faintest idea what it's all about," said Westley.

"What does it look like?" asked Grant, nervously yet eagerly.

"From here, and by the bulk of it, it might be a history of the Ancient and Honorable, the Hudson Bay Company," said Westley.

"You are wrong," replied the factor. "That is what it should be if I had any sense of the fitness of things. Yes, there would be promotion in that, and a chance to go back to civilization, perhaps.

"But I am afraid I couldn't have written it, even if I had thought of it. This—this thing is a novel. I'm a bigger fool than you thought, hey? And I have three more of them locked away in a box."

Westley was astonished. He had not expected to find a novelist at Two Moose House, in the Smoky River country. It was about the last thing he had expected to find there.

"Think of that," he said. "But why do you feel so sore about it? I know a couple of chaps who write novels—mighty slushy ones, too—and you may take my word for it they consider themselves anything but fools.

"They live in London, and one of them has a place in the country. They are good fellows, and though some of their stories are so soft

that you sink in them up to your knees, they have both written a few pretty good books; but I haven't a doubt your novels are just as good."

The factor's mild eyes brightened, and he plucked nervously at his untidy beard.

"You don't know what you are running your head into," he said. "I have written four whacking, long novels—yes, four, now that this one is finished—and not a soul but myself has seen so much as one line of any of them. Westley, I fear that you are not a particularly good-natured chap."

"I beg to differ with you. I am good-natured," returned Westley.

"Then Heaven help you!" exclaimed Grant. "Here, take this home with you, and read as much of it as you can stand. But wait a minute. I'll tie it up for you, and then we must have a drink.

"And you must promise to let me know exactly what you think of it. Sometimes I think the stuff is fairly good, and at other times I am firmly convinced that it is absolute rot. Gad, now I'll know."

"I shall be delighted to read it," said Westley; "but you must not think that I am a critic of books. However, I'll tell you frankly what I think of it, if you really care to hear."

He returned to his cabin half an hour later, encumbered with the bulky manuscript tied up

in brown paper, and well satisfied with the friendly outcome of his visit.

He felt sorry for Grant, and slightly amused by him. He wondered what trick of chance had brought him into the Smoky River country, and forced him to the writing of novels by way of diversion.

Two Moose House, and the huts around it, seemed to sleep like a bear through the winter days. Westley found it very slow; and there was no work for him to put his hands to until he should hear from the High Commissioner of Crown Lands, at Ottawa, concerning his application for twenty thousand acres of land.

He kept away from Dominic's cabin. He had only been inside it once since his arrival at the post, and that was when he had entered to deal with Steve Canadian.

He met Marie in the open several times, but only to exchange the most formal greetings with her. He saw nothing of Steve Canadian, who was evidently in hiding. He read the opening chapters of Grant's novel, and found them astonishingly good.

The story was of the kind generally known as an historical romance, and yet it was unlike any other of its kind that he had ever read.

Treatment and matter were both unusual. The time of the story was the Middle Ages, in the

reign of William Rufus of England, as nearly as he could judge.

In the first five chapters, which was as far as he went before Pierre's return from St. Anne's, no mention was made of any king by name. The hero of the story seemed to be an English forester, in the employ of a gentleman by the name of Richard Fitz Ooff. In the first chapter Hugo, the Norman's baron's armorer, pulls out an aching tooth for Dick the forester—pulls it out with a bow-string.

And that is the way it went, brisk and unusual, and strangely real. Westley wondered where Grant had picked up the ideas and the color.

His opinion of the factor changed for the better. The slow, mild-eyed fellow was evidently possessed of a pretty weighty brain of its kind.

Pierre returned from his second trip, with a letter for Westley addressed in Hush's hand. But the letter was not from Hush. Westley glanced at the front of it, then swiftly at the foot of the last page. He read the name of Walter Joice, swore derisively, opened the door of the stove, and threw the letter into the fire.

"Hang him," he said, "let him go ahead without so much talk about it. I am out of his way, and that's all I want to know about it. I don't want any pity or any preaching. If he wants

her—well, it is none of my business; but I certainly don't intend to dance at the wedding."

Pierre stared at him with wide eyes.

"You don't read that letter," he said. "That looks foolish to me. Maybe it is mighty important."

Westley turned on him sharply.

"You have too much to say, MacKim. Mind your own business, will you. When I want you to attend to mine I'll ask you to do it—and I'll pay you for the trouble."

Pierre looked crestfallen, and presently left the cabin. He went to Dominic's house, and told Marie that David was surely in a very bad temper about some girl.

Marie laughed at him, but he persisted in his belief that Westley was very mad and very foolish, and all because he had fallen out with the girl he loved.

"Did he tell you he loves a girl in New York?" asked Marie.

"He don't need to—I see it," said Pierre. "And he look hungry when I bring the mail—hungry for one letter from her. When he find the letter not the right one, he chuck it into the stove an' cuss like desperation.

"I tell him that maybe he make a mistake to burn the letter, an' he tell me then to go to an' 'tend to my own business.

"Oh, Westley has a temper, yes, but he is a

mighty fine man all the same, an' a good feller when he ain't mad."

"Pierre," said Marie, "you pretty foolish in the head. You better not say anything to M. Westley about his girl, if it make him mad. He may kill you. I guess he never had a girl, anyway—a girl he really love, like you think."

"Oh, yes, he has," returned Pierre. "He tell me once that he know a girl in New York prettier than you, Marie."

Marie's eyes brightened and gazed over the mail-runner's head unseeingly.

"I think he must see plenty of girls prettier than Marie Benoit," she said.

"And why not? I am nothing but one wild French girl, 'way up in the woods."

Pierre set out again with his majesty's mails. Duff and Westley ran lines through the woods, for Duff was a qualified land-surveyor. More snow fell.

Steve Canadian remained away from the post. On the night of the second day after Pierre's departure, Westley met Marie near the door of Dominic's cabin. The man was for passing on, but the woman called his name softly.

He halted and turned toward her, and she ran to him.

"*Monsieur,* I know where you find Steve Canadian," she said.

"But I don't want to find him," replied David.

"So long as he behaves himself quietly he does not bother me. He has not done anything very bad, so far as I know; and I have certainly had the last word with him. No, Marie, I am not bloodthirsty; and I don't hold any grudge against that poor, drunken Indian."

"He says he will kill you some day, *monsieur.*"

"His bark is worse than his bite. Fact is, I don't think he has a bite."

"I feel afraid," said Marie. "He dare not try to hurt you in the daylight, *monsieur,* or when you have your eyes open; but maybe he do you some harm when you sleep some night. Oh, it make me afraid all the time, *monsieur.*"

Westley looked at her keenly and inquiringly. Her round face was a shadow in the starlight, but her wonderful eyes were alive and clear. Her lids lowered before his gaze.

"It is very good of you to think of me," he said, slowly. "I don't know why you do; but it is kind of you—and I am glad.

"But you must not worry any more. Steve will not hurt me. Even if he wants to I'll see that he gets no chance. He has not tried to hurt me yet—and it is a long time since I first bucked up against him. He hasn't any spirit—he hasn't the blood of a fly."

She raised her fine eyes, dark and tender and melting with starlight, to him. He laughed

quietly, with a note of nervousness and confusion.

"You are very beautiful," he said. "I did not think anything in this country could be so beautiful as you."

"You say—you know more pretty girls in New York," whispered Marie.

"Their hearts are not like yours," he replied, unsteadily.

"Oh, *monsieur,* you think my heart is bad," returned the girl with a pitiful little tremor in her voice as if tears tripped the words.

"No," said Westley. "I think your heart is as beautiful as your face. I think it is tender and—artless."

He turned quickly and would have gone immediately to his cabin had she not recalled him.

"*Monsieur,*" she called softly. "I see Steve Canadian to-night in the factor's house."

Westley returned to her.

"In the factor's house?" he queried. "You must be mistaken. What would Grant have that rascally Indian in his house for?"

"I don't know," she said. "Monsieur Grant a very queer man. I see Steve in his house to-night, anyhow, sitting by the big table, an' Monsieur the Factor sitting near him, stooped over the table an' writing, writing."

"And after all, why not?" said Westley. "The

Indian is not an outlaw. The factor has a right to entertain whom he pleases."

"You come with me an' I show you, *monsieur,*" whispered the girl, slipping her fur-gloved hand into his.

"No," said Westley. "No, my dear, I'll not spy on anybody. Steve Canadian is not an outlaw, as I've said; and the factor is queer, I'll admit—but he is a great man. He has a perfect right to entertain the Indian if he wants to."

He lifted the girl's hand, pulled off the glove and touched his lips swiftly to the smooth, warm flesh.

Then he turned and strode away, with something half sweet, half bitter, singing in head and heart. He entered his own cabin without looking back.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SNEAK-THIEF

Pierre MacKim came in from St. Anne's with two telegrams for David. One was from Westley's bankers in New York, and stated that his instructions had come to hand, and that the sum named had been deposited to his account in the Royal Bank of Canada, in Ottawa.

The other communication was from the office of the commissioner of crown lands and stated that Westley could have the lands applied for at the price named, and that the deeds for the same would be forwarded to him immediately upon receipt of check for twenty per cent. of the price; and that particulars followed by post.

Besides these telegrams there was a letter from Hush. It was as follows:

RESPECTED AND DEAR SIR:

I think it is my duty to inform you that Mr. John Angus Gordon called to see you yesterday. Mr. Gordon said, "Tell your master that the longer he stays in the woods the better I'll like it."

He seemed to be in a very excitable mood, sir, and I took the liberty to offer him refreshment, sir, which

same he refused, though politely. He offered me five dollars, very generously; but I informed him, with all due respect, that if he felt that he could not accept my master's liquor I felt that I could not accept his gift. He then permitted me to bring a Scotch and soda to the library for him; and after that, sir, I could not refuse his tip.

He left the house in quite a cheerful humor, sir. At the door he said, "Tell your master that it is all his own fault and that he behaved like a fool."

I am doing no more than my duty, sir, in forwarding his message. He did not ask for your address, sir.

I am lonely. The house is in good order. I think I could find a respectable caretaker for it if you want me to come to the woods, sir. I am very fond of the woods.

I am, sir, your faithful servant,

JAMES HUSH.

Westley read the letter twice, with mixed and conflicting emotions. So old Gordon was glad to have him out of the way? Well, that was exactly what he had expected to hear. Of course Gordon, the shrewd juggler of Wall Street, could see at a glance that Captain Walter Joice was a better match for any girl than David Westley.

Gordon knew enough of the value of money to know that, beyond a certain point, it was not so important as certain other things. Well,

that was all right. He was glad Gordon was pleased.

And Dorothy, of course, was better pleased than her father. She had taken him at his word—which was proof that she had been working toward the break in their relations for some time. Of course he had been a fool, as old Gordon said.

He smiled bitterly. "Hush is true, anyway," he said.

"Hush is a good fellow—and I am inclined to think that Joice is square, too. He was decent enough to write to me. He plays fair—like the best of his kind.

"I wonder what he had to say in that letter? Well, I'm glad I don't know. A bit of a sermon, likely, and some pity—and best wishes for a happy life—and something about Dorothy's grief at having hurt an old friend—and an invitation to the wedding.

"Bah! Now that she has what she wants I hope they'll all leave me alone. If I was a fool I'll stand by the results without their help. Good old Hush. Perhaps I'll send for him one of these days."

At that moment Duff entered the cabin, and Westley crumpled the letter and thrust it into his pocket. Duff was delighted and excited by the communications from the government and the bankers.

"Now we can go right ahead," he cried. "We must get a crew of men from St. Anne's and put them right to work at the tall timber. Maybe we'll have to go farther than St. Anne's for the men and horses we'll need."

Westley finished reading the factor's novel that night, and next morning he took it back to its author. He had not seen Grant since the day the manuscript had been given to him.

Grant was still at the table with a cigar between his teeth. It was quite evident that he was already engaged on another novel. His beard was even more untidy than before, and the far-away look in his mild eyes was more far-away than ever. He welcomed Westley cordially but with an air of nervous anxiety.

"Well?" he queried. And then—with a faint and uncertain note of laughter—"Put on the black cap and have done with it."

Westley placed the manuscript on a corner of the table.

"There's no black cap coming from me," he said. "The yarn is the best of its kind that I've read since 'Forest Lovers.' I'm no critic; but I tell you it is fine stuff. It is real. The quicker you send it out to some publisher the sooner you'll be known to the world."

Grant's thin face flushed above the untidy beard. His mild eyes shone. He licked his lips.

"See here—don't joke," he said breathlessly.

"I mean what I say—every word of it," returned Westley.

The factor got unsteadily to his feet and placed his thin hands on the edge of the table.

"Do you mean—that you—think the story was worth writing—and worth reading?" he asked.

"That is what I mean," replied Westley. "It is more to my taste—more my idea of a good novel—than any yarn I've read in years. It is a wonder. I don't see how the deuce you did it."

"My Heaven!" exclaimed the factor. He sank into his chair, hunched himself forward and hid his face between his hands.

Westley was discomfited. He hemmed and hawed and shuffled his moccasined feet on the caribou hide beneath his chair. This was very bad form on Grant's part, he reflected desperately.

Why should a man—and a gentleman, at that—make such a sloppy fuss just because of writing a good novel? Confound the fellow, anyway, with his mysterious past, his whiskers and his novels. Something must be done—quick.

"Buck up," said Westley. "Brace up, for Heaven's sake. What the deuce is the matter

with you, anyway? You are making an ass of yourself."

Grant, with his face still hidden between his hands, began to laugh. His laughter did not sound normal, even quite sane. Westley left his seat and poured a big nip of whisky into the glass.

"Here, take this, and brace up," he commanded.

The factor straightened himself suddenly in his chair. His mild blue eyes were full of tears and his mouth was twisted between grief and mirth. He brushed his right hand swiftly across his eyes, then extended it and took the glass.

"Westley," he said, "you are an honest man. You like my story, and you say so. You think I am an ass—and you tell me so. I am worse than an ass. I am a fool and a weakling.

"But—but I can brace up without the help of this. Yes, I can—and I'll prove it. Why should I let it kill me now?—now that the door is open for me? The door is open, Westley—the door that—Oh, I talk like an idiot."

With a quick turn of the wrist he emptied the whisky on the floor. Some of the liquor splashed across Westley's feet. Grant laughed.

"Westley, you are a man, a strong man," he said. "Please forgive my frankness. Your strength is your weakness."

He pulled some keys from his pocket and gave them to the bewildered New Yorker.

"Take them," he said. "They'll open the sideboard in the dining-room and a cupboard in my bedroom. Clean them out—please—for Heaven's sake. In the cellar you'll find wines. This is the key. Leave me half a dozen of claret, nothing more.

"Take the rest, Westley, like a good fellow —and hide it all in your own cabin or in the woods.

"I mean it. You'll be doing me a great service, man. I must brace up now, you see; for if you are right about this story, I'll go back to the world. I will send it out by Pierre. I know the names of a few publishers."

Westley took the keys; and before midnight, with Duff's assistance he had cleaned out the factor's store of wines and spirits, leaving only half a dozen bottles of claret in the house.

"The poor chap intends to make a fight for it," he said to Duff, "and I think we can do more than simply deprive him of his grog. I think he is lonely—and he is writing too hard."

After that Westley made a point of looking in at the factor at least once in every day. Poor Grant was as nervous as the proverbial cat, what with his sudden change in habits and anxiety concerning the manuscript which he had sent out to the world.

Westley dragged him away from his writing-table and into the woods with himself and Duff as often as he could without using physical force.

On the twenty-first of November Pierre returned from St. Anne's with a dozen men, Scotchmen, Frenchmen, and half-breeds, and four horses.

Duff took them in hand, and the work of putting up a big camp of logs, a stable, and a store for provisions, clothing, fodder, and grain was immediately commenced.

This crew was a mixed lot; a few of its members were hard tickets; but every man-jack of them was a wonder to work. Roads were "swamped" through the tall timber and tangled brush, the big spruces and pines were brought roaring down, and Westley's first camp was built on a bluff on his own land, overlooking the frozen river, just half a mile below Two Moose House.

Westley spent the greater part of every day with these men, though he continued to sleep in his cabin at the post. Grant was often with him, and Duff always.

Duff acted as boss, storekeeper, and paymaster. Grant wandered about at Westley's heels, gazing at the activities with mild and uncomprehending eyes and smoking innumerable cigars.

Westley felt an interest that was almost violent in the work of these rough men who felled his trees, and ate his food, and took his wages. He was a good axman, and often discarded his blanket "jumper" and brought down a few trees with his own hands.

The men watched him furtively and said nothing, sizing him up. They could see that he was big; they had heard that he was very rich; what they wanted to know were the measurements and quality of his spirit.

Westley and Duff framed a few rules and hung them in the camp. The chief of these was that no liquor was allowed to be drunk during the week, and that any man who drank heavily on Sunday did so at his own risk, for if he should happen to be unfit for work on Monday morning he would be sent packing back to St. Anne's.

"That's a good rule," said Duff; "but as sure as the devil made small potatoes, it will give us some trouble. They can buy all the rum they want at the company's store; and some of them will be sure to want a lot.

"Then there'll be high jinks—but I am thinking that we can hold them down, Mr. Westley. We've both had the proper training for opening up a new country."

More men came in to work for Westley, and

the last of the thirty sleeping bunks in Number One Camp was filled.

Things went ahead without a hitch for two weeks—and then there was a fight. Duff happened to be on hand, however, and with the help of a big Nova Scotian by the name of Archie Stewart, he parted the antagonists before any damage was done.

The fighters, both of whom were French 'breeds, had drawn their knives. This fact aroused Duff's ire, and he gave the offenders a talking to that made them hang their heads. The camp was with him in this, for most of the men believed in fighting with their hands (and a foot now and then), and the rest pretended to.

During all this time Steve Canadian had not shown his ugly face in or about the post, to Westley's knowledge. One night, however, returning late to his cabin from the camp, he met Marie Benoit.

He had avoided Marie of late, against his will but according to his better judgment, and had not exchanged more than a dozen words with her since that night he had withdrawn her glove and kissed her hand.

"Some one break into your cabin to-night, *monsieur*," said Marie. "I see a little light at the window, for just one second, about an hour

ago. I think it Steve Canadian, maybe, so I was afraid to go and see."

They hastened along, David leading the way in the narrow path trodden deep in the snow. Marie kept close at his heels. They crossed the big clearing. The factor had not been in the woods that day; and now David noticed a light in one of the windows of the big house.

He went straight to his own cabin. The heavy door of planks opened at a touch of his hand. The lock had been forced. He was about to enter the dark interior when Marie arrested him on the threshold by clutching his left arm, from behind, with both her hands.

"He may be there now, *monsieur,*" she whispered. "He may be there in the dark, waiting to kill you."

Westley saw sound common sense in this. He would be a fool to run a needless risk of being shot now that he had a big bit of work to do—now that life had become a real thing to him. Quick as a flash he stepped aside from the open door, sweeping the girl with him.

"You are right, Marie," he said. "But what am I to do?"

"Is your revolver in your pocket, *monsieur?*" whispered the girl, standing very close to him in the deep snow beside the open door.

Westley shook his head. "I don't carry a revolver," he said.

"You come over here by the wood-pile and wait," she whispered. "I go to my cabin and get my father's revolver and bring it to you—and you make a torch of bark."

He obeyed her and took cover near his own wood-pile.

She darted away into the uncertain starshine. He tore white bark from the fagots of birch and twisted it into a torch such as the salmon-spearers use.

She was soon back at his side, breathing quickly. She placed a heavy revolver in his hand and possessed herself of the torch of bark.

"Come now, *monsieur*," she whispered. "I light the bark and throw it into the cabin, and then you see everything—and if you see Steve Canadian you shoot quick."

"Give me the torch," he replied. "I'll do it all, Marie."

"No, he might shoot quick," she said, turning to run toward the cabin.

He caught her with his left hand by the back of her fur coat. She struggled to escape him, holding the unlighted roll of bark at arm's length in front of her.

He laid the revolver on the top of the wood, and with both arms free caught her more securely and drew her to him.

"If he shoots quick," he said, unsteadily, "he's certainly not going to shoot you, Marie. Give

me the torch. I can light it and throw it in as well as you can. Come, be reasonable. Be a good girl."

To draw her right arm inward and obtain the torch he was forced to hold her strong, slender body close. He rejoiced in the necessity and at the same moment condemned the action.

He wrenched the bark from her hand. The blood sang in his veins and he laughed softly. It seemed to him that this was all in keeping, in harmony, with the snow and the starlight, the vasts of black forests, the rough, open, venturesome life.

This woman who struggled in his grasp, anxious to face danger for him, was the spirit of the northern wilderness. The world and Pierre MacKim were alike forgotten.

Marie struggled—and then, suddenly, she ceased to struggle. She lay resting in his arms, breathing deep and quick, her body trembling a little, her face upturned to his, white in its frame of soft fur, her dark eyes luminous.

And at that Westley's brain cleared and his heart stood still. He crushed her close, held her so for a moment—and then his arms relaxed and fell to his sides.

"Come," he said, "this won't do. Keep back, Marie. I will light the torch and throw it into the cabin; but very likely he has gone by now."

The girl's only reply was a low sob. Westley took the revolver and moved cautiously toward the door, keeping well out of line of it, though his mind was busy with other things than the man who might even now be crouching in his own house waiting to shoot him.

He crept to the edge of the black doorway, removed his coat, and using it for a screen, struck a match and lit the roll of bark. The yellow flame ran up swiftly with a plume of black smoke.

Westley dropped his coat, leaned forward and threw the torch into the cabin. It fell on the floor in the middle of the single room and burned strongly and steadily. Westley, revolver in hand, peeped cautiously around the edge of the door-frame.

Every corner of the room was illuminated by the torch. The cabin was empty.

Westley laughed cheerlessly, got to his feet and turned to retrace his steps to Marie. But Marie had gone.

Westley stood for a long time in his unlighted home, with his foot on the blackened head of the torch, suffering keenly, dully conscious of an inner struggle.

He had worked hard that day. He ached now, body and soul. At last he fumbled about, found the lamp and lit it. He laid Dominic's

revolver on the table and closed the door. Then he began to hunt around the cabin to learn the extent of the robbery.

His rifles and guns were in their places. His papers were undisturbed, and his silver cigarette-case lay in open sight on a corner of the table, just as he had left it that morning. His provisions, clothing, and blankets were all intact.

He lifted the narrow mattress in the bunk, disclosing a wooden trap like the cover of a cabin-locker aboard ship. He saw in a moment that the fastening of this locker had been forced. He lifted the trap and found the bottles and cases of liquor in disorder.

This was his hiding-place for the factor's wines and spirits. He brought the lamp to the bunk and soon found that five bottles of whisky and two of brandy had been taken. He was angry and puzzled.

The offender was Steve Canadian, of course; but why had he confined his attention to the spirits? Surely there were other things in the cabin more worth while—more worth while even to a drunken Indian? There was money in one of the boxes, for instance, and hundreds of dollars' worth of portable goods of one kind and another.

"I'll certainly give my time and attention to Master Steve first thing in the morning,"

he said. "I'll make this country so hot for him that he'll get out and stay out."

He then produced a hammer, screws and a screw-driver and repaired his broken door. He smoked in front of the stove and read for an hour or so. But his eyes were heavy with desire for sleep and his brain was full of a sharp, discomfiting unrest.

He felt excitement, too, excitement that was not entirely unpleasant. He tried to keep Marie Benoit out of his thoughts; but was unsuccessful in this.

He remembered Pierre MacKim and cursed himself. He went to bed and slept like a log. Toward morning he dreamed. In one of these fragmentary dreams he met Marie Benoit in the woods behind the clearing of the post, at a time of unreal twilight which was neither of dawn nor sunset.

She lifted her face to his—and it was the face of Dorothy Gordon. This wisp of night vision haunted him vaguely when he first awoke; but it faded quickly from his mind in the morning sunshine.

Westley breakfasted, then left the cabin and walked over to the factor's house. He looked across the trampled snow to Dominic Benoit's cabin and noted, with a pang that he did not attempt to analyze, the closed door and quiet windows and the smoke rising straight up

from the little chimney of gray stone. The Indian lad, Gabe, opened the door of the factor's house to him.

"Mr. Grant, him sick," said Gabe. "Him stay in bed to-day."

"Sick?" queried Westley. "What is the matter?"

"I dunno," replied Gabe, avoiding the other's eye. "Him sick abed."

"I'll go to his room and see what I can do for him," said David. He stepped into the hall; but the lad blocked his path. He brushed the servant aside with a sweep of his arm and ran up the narrow stairs.

Gabe turned and for a moment seemed to contemplate following the visitor. His dull, brown eyes flashed, then dulled again. He grunted, closed the door, and returned to his business in the back of the house.

Westley found the factor's bedroom—and the factor asleep across the bed, fully dressed. Only his collar had been unfastened and his moccasins unlaced and pulled off. A blanket was spread untidily over him. He snored harshly, lying flat on his back.

"Drunk," said Westley; and turned and went quietly downstairs.

He entered the big living-room where Grant had written that fine story and others perhaps

as fine. There was no fire in the stove, and the dogs were not in the room. The close air was rancid with the dead smoke of cigars and the reek of whisky.

Books and papers cluttered the table, cigar-butts lay on the floor, a glass and an empty bottle stood beside the discarded pen and half-written page. Another whisky bottle, with the lead seal unbroken, lay on the bearskin beneath the table. Westley examined both bottles. Then he left the room and went upstairs again.

"I am not the only one," he reflected. "It takes all kinds of fools to make a world."

He found a bucket of cold water—so cold that little splinters of ice tinkled together when he lifted it—in the factor's dressing-room.

He carried this into the bedroom, where the weakling officer of the great company still snored in the deep stupor of intoxication. He set the bucket down, then spread a blanket on the floor beside the bed. He lifted Grant and laid him on the blanket.

"You!" he exclaimed. "You dirty sneak-thief. You drunken swine. Are you the man who wrote that story about the forester and the baron? Well, you put your case in the hands of David Westley; and you'll be glad that you did, some day."

He lifted the bucket and poured about a quart

of the water, ice and all, upon the upturned face. The snoring ceased. The closed eyes opened. The factor licked his lips.

"That's good," he said, huskily. "Gimme a drink of it—a big drink."

Westley knelt, raised Grant's head and held the heavy bucket to his lips.

The sufferer drank eagerly, then fell back and closed his eyes again. Westley had no intention of desisting from his ministrations at this point, however.

He poured the remainder of the chilly fluid—about five quarts of it—full in the bearded face. Grant spluttered, gasped, turned over, and hoisted himself to his hands and knees.

"What the deuce?" he exclaimed. "What are you doing?"

"Now get into bed, if you can, and sleep it off," said Westley. "I came here to tell you that Steve Canadian had broken into my cabin and stolen some whisky; but I find that you are the thief. Get into bed and think it over. You were dead right when you called yourself a weakling."

He left the room without waiting for a reply from the poor devil on the floor. He found the brandy and remaining bottles of whisky and smashed them on the stove in the living-room, letting the shattered glass lie there for a sign and a warning.

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER LETTER AND ITS FATE

Dorothy Gordon played a difficult game bravely and well. To all her world she maintained a bright and undismayed face—to the kindly, wondering men, the watchful women; to the low-voiced, inquisitive servants in her father's house; to her anxious father, and to Captain Joice.

Outwardly she continued to live the familiar busy, meaningless life. She saw Walter Joice only once a week; and their relations were friendly but less cheerful than of old. She knew that her father had become very fond of the Englishman, and that the two spent much of their time together; but she asked no questions.

She understood what was in her father's heart and mind. Women asked her about David Westley, watching her furtively as they questioned and awaited the answer, keen to scent trouble, keen to get away in full cry and run it to earth or take a notable brush in the open.

"David is in the North, shooting," she would

reply, smiling at the questioner with untrembling lips and clear eyes. "That sort of life has become a passion with him."

"When do you expect him back?"

"Not before late in the spring; and then he means to go direct from Montreal to England, where he will meet Aunt Mary and me." (She lied delightfully, showing nothing of the knife in her heart.)

"He is anxious to shoot a musk-ox, you know; and that will take him away up across the Arctic Circle."

Dorothy knew that Joice had written to David. She had asked him, pointblank; and he had told the truth. She had been angry for a moment, then thankful.

Day after day she awaited word from David. Day after day dragged miserably into the past and no word came. Joice received no reply to his letter. This she knew without asking.

But David would write to her, and beg her forgiveness, soon—as soon as the blind bitterness of his anger and foolish pride had cleared away. He loved her. They had loved one another for years.

And after he had written then she would ask his pardon and admit having been partly to blame. And so she waited; and December came, and Christmas—and still no word from David, far away in the northern woods. She

knew that he was still in the north of this continent, for Captain Joice had told her so. He had made sure of that much by questioning James Hush.

Christmas passed and the New Year came; and Dorothy's pride broke at last. She forgot the violent and humiliating words and incidents of the parting scene with David. She remembered only the parting, and that he had gone from her in anger and pain.

On the night of New Year's Day she dined alone with her father. After dinner she went straight to her own room, locked the door and wrote to David. She wrote what was in her heart, her pride broken by fear and loneliness. She wrote it all—and tears fell upon the paper and smudged the ink.

She opened her aching heart to him. They had both been in the wrong, she said; they had both acted foolishly; but what did it matter so long as they loved each other?

She told him of the days and nights of weary waiting. She told him of her fear that some hurt would come to him away off there in the desolate, menacing wilderness. She had dreamed of seeing him in moments of peril, in the shade of great trees and in the white waters of bellowing rapids.

She reread what she had written, then tore the pages to fragments and wrote again more

briefly and with more restraint. But even now she made no disguise of words to hide her aching heart from him.

She sealed this letter and inscribed the square, dull-white envelope with David's name. That was all, for she knew that it would have to be forwarded by David's man.

She spent a sleepless night; and next day telephoned to Walter Joice. He called early in the afternoon. She gave him the letter to take to James Hush. He held the envelope in his hand for a little while before putting it in his pocket, staring at it with a face as red as fire.

"I wrote to him," he blurted. "There has been plenty of time in which to receive an answer. I have not heard from him. May I ask—if you have heard?"

Dorothy's eyes filled with tears and she turned her small, perfect face away from him.

"Would you believe me—if I said that I had heard from him?" she asked.

"I should believe you," he said, unsteadily. "Of course—in anything. Have you heard from him, Dorothy? I claim a right—to ask."

"I have not heard," she answered, without looking at him. "I am afraid—that something may have happened to him. So I have written."

"I will give the letter to his man," said Joice, quietly.

He left the house and walked down-town. He took the letter from his pocket, looked at it, and thrust it back again.

"Hang the fellow," he said. His face was white, now. "But for her I'd go north and find him, if it took me a year—and knock some decency into him if it killed him—or me. But there'll be talk enough, very soon, as it is; and I have no right to take things into my own hands."

Again he produced the letter and gazed at the monogram in thin gold on the flap of the envelope, and the little seal of violet wax. He noticed that the seal was thin and badly placed. For the purposes of a seal it was not effective. He went to his club and applied a big dab of red wax to the envelope and stamped it securely with his own ring.

Then he took the letter around to James Hush.

Up and back at Two Moose House in the Smoky River country things moved briskly along, and life for David Westley was a rough, alert, stamping reality. The business of cutting timber went forward without any serious hitches.

More men came in, and a second camp was built, three miles farther up river than the first. Archie Stewart, the big Nova Scotian, was made boss of the old camp, and a man from St. Anne's was put in charge of the new. Mr. Duff

maintained a general supervision of both camps, kept the books and wrote most of Westley's business letters.

Business letters were now Westley's only correspondence, for he had cut himself off entirely from the old life. He saw and talked frequently with Marie Benoit now. He could not ignore her now, since that night when she had tried to risk her life for him at the open door of the unlighted cabin; but he kept himself well in hand.

The girl was more reserved with him than she had been at first. David had returned the revolver to Dominic on the day after that incident—on the day that he had found the factor drunk with his own stolen liquor.

Grant had come to David's cabin late that same night, shaken and desperately humble, and had confessed to his weak and dishonorable deed. Yes, he had thought that Steve Canadian would be charged with the robbery.

David had reasoned with him, argued with him, sworn at him. The factor had walked straight since then; but in what agony of body, mind, and spirit David could only guess.

Steve Canadian had appeared at the post irregularly, sometimes once and sometimes twice a week. He came from the woods and he returned to the woods; and though Westley and

Duff wondered, neither took the trouble to set himself to the task of discovering the Indian's hiding-place.

The fellow came and went without raising any serious disturbance. He kept out of Westley's way and seemed to have lost interest in Marie Benoit and Pierre MacKim. He confined his visits to the factor's house and the store.

On the night of the Sunday before Christmas he managed to offend one of Westley's choppers in some way, on the plank platform in front of the store. Both men had been drinking heavily all day.

The fight was brief and feeble. The only injuries received were the result of falling down on the icy platform. The onlookers had taken it as a good joke, and Steve had gone back to his retreat with a bump on the back of his head and a very vague idea as to how he came by it.

Christmas itself was a roaring day in and about the post. Only the cooks at the camps and the storekeeper at the post were on duty. Duff predicted trouble before night. Archie Stewart and the boss of Number Two camp agreed with him.

Westley spent the morning with Grant, in the sitting-room of the big house, with an eye

on the window. Duff, who knew that the company's store would be a storm-center, volunteered to take on his old job for the day.

It was a fine day, windless, sunlit, with the mercury about twelve below zero. The post wore something of the aspect of a country fair transplanted to a bizarre setting.

The men from the camps, between fifty and sixty in number, filled the store to overflowing, crowded the platform, stood in clusters on the trampled snow, and sent bottles of divers shapes circulating from hand to hand.

They sang, they whistled, they smoked, and every now and then one or two flipped their feet in the opening steps of a backwoods dance. They made a picturesque scene. Shortly before noon they started back for their camps to eat their Christmas dinners. Their foremen went with them, herding them along the snowy tracks like sheep.

For a couple of hours the post was quiet. Duff came over to the big house and lunched with the factor and Westley. Grant was in good spirits and talked cheerily.

"You seem to be in fine feather," said Duff. "Who has left you a fortune?"

"Nobody that I know of," replied the factor; "but the moment I woke up this morning I felt that something good was in line for me."

"I wish I felt the same way," said Duff;

"but I have a hunch that there is trouble ahead of me. I'll know all about it before long. Though I have refused to sell any liquor since eleven o'clock this morning, the boys seem to have an inexhaustible supply on hand."

The lumbermen returned to the post at the double. A few of them could not double, and fell by the way; but they arrived later, in open order.

Fiddles were called for. Two were produced, whereupon half a dozen eager fellows set about the tuning of each instrument. Strings snapped. The men who held the bows could not agree with the lads who had gained possession of the resin.

One lump of resin was applied to a human face instead of to the horse-hairs. Duff and David ran to the scene of activity and pried the would-be musicians apart. The fiddles were beyond help, and only the lumps of resin remained intact. The company looked crestfallen.

"Cheer up, men," said Westley. "I'll find you a fiddler and a fiddle; but you must give me your word, 'cross your hearts, that you'll not knock them about."

The men swore, across their hearts, that Westley's fiddler and fiddle would be as safe with them as though they were in a church.

"Then I'll see what I can do for you," said Westley.

The men cheered him. He shouldered his way good-humoredly out of the press in front of the store, and made his way across to Dominic Benoit's cabin.

Marie had kept her father close indoors throughout the morning, so as to keep him out of mischief. When David rapped on the door the merry fellow was tuning his fiddle. Marie looked through a window, then opened the door.

"I was afraid, *monsieur,*" she said, with downcast eyes. "All day I have kept the door fastened, for fear of the men from the lumber-camps, and to keep my poor father from going out to them. My father is very easy to excite, *monsieur.* He would quickly have his coat off and be into a fight."

Westley saw instantly that it would be unfair to the girl, as well as to the man himself, to ask Dominic to bring his fiddle and play for the lumber-jacks.

"It would be useless for us to try to keep the men quiet to-day," he said.

"Duff and I are humoring them a bit; and we hope to see them through the day without any trouble. But I think it is very wise of you to keep the door fastened, Marie, and your father safe inside. I have come over to borrow your father's fiddle.

"Dominic, will you lend me your fiddle for a few hours? The boys want to dance. If they

break it I'll buy you a new one—and a better one."

He stepped inside the cabin with Marie.

"You want my fiddle, *monsieur?*" said Dominic. "You better take me, too, for to play the fiddle. I play the fiddle good. You listen; and then you take me for to play the dances to the boys."

"You are better off where you are, here with Marie," replied David. "You don't want to get mixed up with all those toughs of mine, Dominic. You are a Frenchman, and it would not be dignified for a pure-blooded Frenchman to play the fiddle for that bunch of choppers."

Dominic nodded his head, and handed over the fiddle. Westley thanked him, and turned toward the door. Marie put her hand on the wooden latch. She looked up, shyly, into his face. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes bright and tender.

"That was good, *monsieur,*" she whispered. "You are very kind—and that was a smart thing. I thank you with my heart, *monsieur.* Now my poor father sit quiet all day, and think about his fine, pure blood. Yes, you touch him on the right spot—on his pride—*monsieur.*"

David smiled into her eyes. She opened the door slowly, as if reluctantly.

"*Monsieur* is still angry with me," she whispered. "I am sorry."

"No," said David, and then both looked up and saw a crowd of the lumbermen standing in front of the cabin, one leaning upon another, some staggering, all grinning broadly.

"Ha!" exclaimed a half-breed. "Dat pretty girl I ever see—dat girl of yours. Bring her out an' we all dance with dat girl of yours. Yes, dat all right an' fair."

A shout of agreement arose from the crowd. Marie plucked at David's sleeve. "Come in, *monsieur,*" she whispered.

"You go in and fasten the door," said David, quietly.

He stepped down and walked boldly up to the front rank of the crowd. He held the fiddle under his left arm. He halted within a yard of the leaders. His eyes were as cold in sheen and color as ice.

"Men," he said, "I am boss here. I never allow anybody to talk to me as you have just done. If I hear another word of it there'll be trouble, quick. I mean it. Look at me and see. The biggest and best man among you would be no match for me, even if he happened to be sober."

"That's right, sir," said a white man. "We ain't lookin' for trouble."

Westley's manner, even more than his words, had done the trick.

A sober man with some skill as a fiddler was found, and the dance commenced. Westley moved about among the spectators, and once or twice even mingled with the dancers. Several brawls started up, only to sink as suddenly at his approach.

And so Christmas passed without accident, thanks to David Westley.

One afternoon in January, David sat by the little stove in his cabin in a bitter mood. Snow was falling outside in slow, flat flakes. The wilderness was as colorless as the man's thoughts. He had been cheerful, busy, and thoughtless for many days, and now the reaction was upon him.

Since early morning he had sat by the stove, brooding over the days of his past.

The door opened and Pierre MacKim entered the cabin, with snow clinging to his shoulders and fur cap. He swept the cap from his head, and the snow fell, hissing upon the stove. His thin face was moist and aglow. He threw off his huge gloves and laughed.

"Snow pretty thick to-day," he said, "but I don't make camp. I come right through. The factor, he get one letter that he say mighty fine, and I guess he come right over here to tell you about it.

"He got his promotion at last, maybe. And

I got one letter for you, mister—one good letter, like the kind you look for, I guess. That's why I don't make camp to-day, but come right along through."

He produced a square envelope from his pocket, and thrust it into Westley's hand. Westley stared at the inscription with chilling eyes. He saw that the name was in Dorothy Gordon's hand, and the address in that of the faithful Hush.

His face paled, then flushed darkly. He turned the envelope over, and looked at the monogram on the flap. Then the two seals caught his attention. He examined them closely.

"Very suitable," he said, and laughed unpleasantly.

He leaned forward, pulled open the door of the stove, and dropped the letter into the heart of the fire.

"Fool!" exclaimed Pierre MacKim.

Westley closed the door of the stove, and turned slowly in his chair. He started slightly when he caught the look of anger and disgust on the mail-runner's swarthy face. Then he smiled.

"Sit down, Pierre," he said. "You've had a hard trip. Rest a while."

"I bring you the letter," returned Pierre, in a voice that shook, "an' you chuck it into the

stove. That letter from your girl. I know. You wait for that letter—an' then you burn it. You too big a fool, an' too ugly in your temper, to open it an' read it. No, Pierre MacKim don't want anything of you!"

Westley jumped up with an oath.

CHAPTER X

WHO KNIFED PIERRE?

Pierre MacKim did not flinch. His thin face paled; but he stood his ground, his hands at his sides, his dark eyes unwavering.

For what seemed a long minute to both of them, the two men faced each other in a quivering silence. Westley's face was dark and drawn with anger, and his right hand was clenched and swung back. Pierre was the first to break the formidable quiet.

"Yes, you hit me if you want to," he said, faintly. "You lot bigger than me, an' stronger, too; but I mean what I say. I think you one almighty fool to burn that letter. I think you got a sore head, like Steve Canadian, when he drink too much. I think you don't know what you do, David Westley."

"Don't venture too far," said Westley, in a stifled voice. "I'll not stand for much more of your cursed cheek."

"You got a devilish bad temper, I know," returned Pierre. "Yes, but I can get mad, too; an' now you make me mad as I can be.

"I think of that girl who writes to you, an'

how you chuck the letter into the fire, an' I get so mad I don't care what you do to me, David Westley. I tell you what I think—I think you treat that girl like a skunk."

And still Westley did not strike.

"Pierre, you are a fool, but you are a braver man than I thought," he said. "Your talk has no sense, except what you say about my temper; but I admire your courage. If your eye flickered once, Pierre—if you showed so much as a hint of fear—I'd knock you into a heap on the floor.

"Yes, and you know it. That's what holds my fist where it is—the knowledge that you know I could beat you with one hand. Your heart is big; but your brain is no bigger than a butternut."

"I see what I see," replied Pierre, doggedly. "You tell me nothin'; but I guess. I see the misery in your eyes; an' then I see the dirty pride get to work in you.

"Yes, you think your trouble all the girl's fault, but she write to you, an' you let the dirty pride chuck the letter into the fire. You don't want to be happy, I guess. I think you let your temper fly at that girl—that's what I think. I watch you mighty close, an' I see that you are strong an' weak, kind an' cruel."

Westley sat down, trembling with the tax of restraint he had put upon his temper. His brain was clear and reasonable, but his blood

was seething. He grasped the arms of his chair with his big, muscular, finely shaped hands.

"You talk of something you know nothing about," he said. "You are partly right about the girl; yes, there was a girl. She made a fool of me, Pierre.

"That letter was from her; but why should I read it. What has been done is done; and I should be doubly a fool to pay any attention to anything she may have to say. Oh, yes, there is another man—and his seal was on the back of that letter.

"He franked the letter. Whatever was inside it he agreed to. As for my bad temper, Pierre, I assure you that if it gets me into trouble I'll not ask you to help me out. I'll look after myself; and I'll thank you, in the future, to leave my temper and my affairs alone—in short, to mind your own business."

"No," said Pierre. "You can't scare me. You have been a good friend to me. I like you. You save my money, an' maybe my bones, the very first time you see me. You always treat me fine, David Westley. But you don't scare me now.

"I don't care how you cuss me—I will look out for you. I feel sorry about that girl. I think a lot about that girl when I travel the trail, an' I make fine pictures of her in my head.

"Queer, that; but plenty of queer things creep

into a man's brain when he walk all day alone in the woods. Yes, I am sorry she treat you bad. I wonder why she write that letter to you if she don't like you? Well, I guess maybe you are right—an' I am a fool, like you say. Anyhow, if ever you get into trouble, an' Pierre MacKim not too far away, you bet he'll jump in an' fight for you like one mad bobcat. Yes, that's the truth."

"I believe you," said David.

After Pierre MacKim had taken his departure, Westley paced the floor of his cabin for half an hour, his chin sunk on the collar of his woollen shirt, his strong hands twitching behind his back.

Once he halted at the stove, opened the door and looked within. The glowing coals of dry maple and birch shone hotly up against his face. Among the film-thin flakes of gray ashes was a curled flake of black.

He closed the door and went on with his restless pacing back and forth. He did not desist until the door opened and Mr. Duff entered quite unexpectedly.

"The portable sawmill we sent for has reached St. Anne's," said Duff. "Jones sent a man in to let us know. What do you mean to do about it, sir? We surely need it bad, to saw lumber for the big mill and the other shacks you planned."

David unclasped his hands from the small of his back, squared his shoulders, and pushed a chair toward his assistant.

"We must get it in," he said. "We need it, don't we? As we intend to manufacture most of our own cut, we must have the big mill ready for work early in the spring. We'll bring the little mill in on runners."

"The distance is seventy miles; and there has been more snow than I looked for. There is no road between here and St. Anne's."

"You mean the horses couldn't make it on the river?"

"They'd be in down to their bellies every step, sir. Two miles of it would strip their legs to the bone, to say nothing of busting their hearts. I must admit, sir, I made a bad miscalculation about that portable mill.

"They were slow in shipping it to St. Anne's; and I didn't expect so much snow on the river. I've seen it clean as a ball-room floor until the middle of January."

Westley lit a cigarette and turned his chair toward the table.

"Have a couple of whopping big toboggans built," he said. "See about that immediately. Set all the handy men at the job. You know the size. When the toboggans are ready we'll load them with grub enough to last about forty men for the round trip. If we can haul pork

and flour and beans in by hand we can jolly well haul in a portable sawmill."

"But we've hauled in only a few hundredweight since the snow got deep," said Duff. "The teams brought in the bulk of our stuff before the first of December—and a good thing, too. If there were eighteen inches of snow on the level then there are three to four feet of it now."

"We'll do it, anyway," said Westley, glad to find a tough job to apply himself to.

"If we can't do it with less than sixty men, then we'll use both gangs, down to the last man. Just think of it, Duff. Think of sixty men, with snowshoes on their feet, marching three abreast down the middle of old Smoky, with two toboggans behind them freighted with enough grub to last those sixty from here to St. Anne's and back again.

"Wouldn't that hammer down a road firm and smooth enough for the same sixty to twitch the portable sawmill along? I think so."

"I guess you're right," returned Duff after a minute's reflection. "There'll be some rough sledding in spots. And it will be costly; but I guess it will work out all right in the end. Yes, we need the mill. I'll just figure out the dimensions of the sleds now."

While Duff worked out the details of the toboggans, with a suggestion now and then from

Westley, Mr. Grant came to the cabin, bareheaded, flecked with snow, carrying an open letter in his hand. His mild eyes were shining.

"Westley, this chap thinks almost as much of my story as you do," he said. "Read what he says, man. And here's a contract to be signed."

It was a fact. The publisher to whom Grant had sent his novel had offered to print and exploit it on very much the usual terms. Westley read the letter and the contract and congratulated the author heartily. Even Duff was greatly impressed.

"If it goes," said Grant excitedly, "I should be out of here in a year or so—out of the woods and back to the world. Think of that, man! And I have you to thank for it.

"Bless my soul, it was a good day for me when you blew into this God-forsaken country. Westley, I'll live in London—in a little square I know of not very far from a green park I have not forgotten."

"Every man to his taste," said Duff. "When are you going to notify the company of your plans?"

"Not now, you may be sure," replied the factor, laughing. "I'll sit tight until this is a sure thing. Now I'm going home to commence knocking one of my other yarns into shape for publication."

"I'd like to know what ever sent Donald Grant into the woods," said Duff, blinking his eyes at Westley. "Would it be a woman, I wonder; or did he disgrace himself in some way when he was in the army?"

"He seems on the square to me," replied Westley. "Was he a heavy drinker when you first knew him?"

"No," said Duff. "He acquired that cheerful habit right here."

Duff went back to Number One Camp before supper-time. The fall of snow had ceased and a few stars glittered high overhead.

Westley filled his pipe and went out for a breath of fresh air. He passed Dominic Benoit's cabin. Half-way between the Frenchman's habitation and Pierre MacKim's cabin he stumbled over something in the path. Recovering himself, he turned and found the body of a man lying motionless and huddled in the trail, lightly covered with a film of new-fallen snow. The body lay face down.

Westley knelt and turned it over tenderly, disclosing the thin face of Pierre MacKim. The eyes were closed and the cheeks were very pale. Westley lifted the body in his arms; and on the soft snow where it had lain he saw a round, dark stain as large as his two hands and deeply pitted.

He retraced his steps swiftly, kicked open

the door, and laid the senseless form of the young woodsman on the rug in front of the stove. He closed the door, lit the lamp with shaking fingers, and knelt again beside the body.

"Thank Heaven, I didn't hit him to-day," he murmured.

Pierre breathed faintly and his heart continued to beat, though weakly. The heavy clothing was sodden with blood on his back, one side and breast.

Westley unbuttoned the front of the blanket "jumper," slit it down the back with a knife, and so removed it. He cut away the heavy jersey and sodden shirts; and on the smooth, lean, muscular back he found the wound. For a moment he stared at the fearful thing. His eyes narrowed, his jaws set, his big hands clenched as hard as stone.

"This won't do," he muttered. "Righteous fury won't help him now. About the base of the left lung, I should say. Done by a butcher's knife, by the look of it. I think it is a good thing that it bled so freely."

He stood up and stared around the room, as if looking for help in the shadowy corners. He stepped quickly to his bunk and back again with a blanket, which he spread lightly over Pierre

"No doctor within seventy miles of us, I suppose," he said.

He set a kettle of water on the stove and threw in more wood. He opened a bottle of brandy, poured out a stiff dose of it, turned Pierre over and raised his head and forced a little of the liquor between his bloodless lips. The woodsman opened his eyes.

"Come, drink a little more," urged Westley. "You need it. You are hurt. But lie still, Pierre. Don't move, on your life."

Pierre swallowed a sip of the brandy.

"It is too strong," he said faintly. And then, "I feel no pain. Ah, now I remember—and the pain was sharp and sudden."

"Don't talk now," cautioned Westley. "I shall do what I can for you, and then find some one who can do better."

With folded blankets and pillows he propped Pierre up on his right side. The thin-lipped wound still bled slowly but steadily. He washed it thoroughly with hot water and a clean linen cloth, then continued to bathe it for several minutes.

He sincerely regretted his ignorance of surgery and tortured his brain for some scraps of knowledge that might now be put to use. He considered it a good sign that the wound continued to bleed outwardly, for he had heard

somewhere of the danger of internal bleeding in wounds of this kind.

And yet the dark blood stole out quietly, as if no important artery had been severed. He tore a clean sheet into wide strips and bound Pierre around and around, first having placed a pad of soft linen upon the cut.

"You are pretty smart doctor," said Pierre, smiling grayly. "Who knifed me, anyhow? I didn't see anybody; I didn't hear anything."

"Steve Canadian, I suppose," replied Westley. "We'll find that out, all in good time. But you must not worry; and you must lie absolutely still. After I fix you more comfortably I'll go and consult with the factor. He should know more about doctoring than I do."

"I guess you know most everything," said Pierre MacKim.

Westley fixed him a comfortable bed on the floor without disturbing him, covered him warmly, gave him a sip of brandy and water, and left the cabin.

He started for the big house, then changed his course and went to Dominic Benoit's cabin. The father and daughter were at supper, and Marie opened the door to him. Her fine eyes brightened swiftly and lowered as swiftly as she recognized the visitor.

"Have you seen anything of Steve Canadian in the post to-day?" asked Westley, glancing

quickly over his shoulder, then stepping into the room. Dominic pushed his chair back from the table and stood up. He bowed to Westley with a fine air.

"No, *monsieur,*" replied the young woman. "I have not seen that fellow for days and days —and I pray to the saints that I may never more see him again with these two eyes. But why do you ask, *monsieur?*"

"Some one has knifed Pierre in the back to-night," said Westley. "I found him lying senseless in the snow, between this cabin and his own. That is why I ask if you have seen that sneaking, cursed Indian."

The warm color faded from Marie's face and she raised her eyes in terrified inquiry.

"Knifed?" she whispered. "Not to death, *monsieur?*"

Westley's eyes were upon her. His gaze was intent and keen. He had expected a greater display of consternation and grief than this. He turned to Dominic, who was gazing at him with wide eyes and a slack jaw.

"Pierre is alive; and, considering the nature of the wound, seems to be doing remarkably well," he said coolly. "I have attended to him as well as I know how; but I am looking for help and advice."

"You take me to Pierre, *monsieur,*" said Dominic. "I know something about knife cuts,

you bet. Pretty good doctor, me, Dominic Benoit."

"You tell his mother yet, *monsieur?*" queried Marie faintly.

Westley shook his head, then thanked the Frenchman for his offer of assistance, and accepted it. He was puzzled by the girl's attitude.

Could it be that she did not care anything for Pierre MacKim, after all? If this were the case, then for whom did she care—to whom had her affections turned? He felt uneasy and not entirely guiltless.

"I will go tell Rosie MacKim," said Marie. "I will tell her that Pierre get hurt, but not very bad. Father, you put on your coat."

Westley hurried back to Pierre; and Dominic followed in a few minutes. Pierre was resting comfortably.

The Frenchman gave it as his opinion that the knife had missed any vital organ, and that Westley's treatment and dressing were the best that could be applied under the existing conditions.

"If fever don't heat his blood, he soon be all well," said Dominic. "Anyway, I watch him close. I look out sharp for the fever. He better not have very big supper. Some tea, maybe, an' condensed milk."

Westley left the Frenchman in charge and went over to the store. He returned with

evaporated cream, condensed milk, canned soups, and several more dainties.

He charged Pierre not to change his position without Dominic's help, and then went to the factor's house. He found Grant at supper, and joined him. Grant's face was shining and his beard looked more untidy than ever.

"Westley, you have done me a good turn," he said. "I had given up hope of ever going back to the world—to the world of men who know other things than the fur trade. I wrote my stories to kill time—and I drank more than was good for me for the same reason.

"And now I see the door—and it is half open. Within the year, perhaps, I shall pass through —and I have only you to thank for it, Westley."

"All I did was to read one of your stories and tell the truth about what I thought of it," said Westley. "I am glad the accident turned out so well. By the way, if you feel that you are under any obligations, you can do something for me in return."

"Name the service," replied the factor. "I am your man."

"Then warn Steve Canadian out of this country," said Westley.

"Steve Canadian? The vagrant Indian? Why, what has he done to you?"

"He has knifed Pierre MacKim in the back, that is all."

"When was that—and are you sure of your man? Is Pierre dead?"

"No, Pierre is alive; but seriously wounded. It happened to-day. I found the poor chap about an hour ago, lying senseless in the snow half-way between Benoit's cabin and his own. He was struck from behind and did not see or hear the sneak who did it. It's a bad stab; but he is not losing much blood.

"I am afraid the knife went through the bottom of the left lung. I think there can be little doubt as to the identity of the stabber. Who else than Steve Canadian is skunk enough?"

The factor stared down at his plate and pulled at his beard.

"Do you know that Canadian has been in the post to-day?" he asked.

"No, I have not seen him—and no one has told me that he was in the post," replied Westley. "I have not been watching his comings and goings lately; but if you have no authority here I'll set my whole gang of men to hunting out his hiding-place and running him out of the country. I know he is the man who tried to kill Pierre."

"How do you know?" asked the factor, without raising his eyes. "How do you know that it was a man at all? It might have been a woman. I have heard of such things. What about Marie Benoit?"

CHAPTER XI

THE FACTOR'S STORY

David Westley stared at the factor of Two Moose, speechless with astonishment. The factor continued to gaze down at his plate.

"Yes—what about Marie Benoit?" he repeated. "She is as primitive as she is pretty, you know—and that's saying a good deal. A primitive woman in love is very apt to lose all sense of proportion and justice."

"Do you mean that she knifed Pierre in a fit of jealousy?" asked Westley. "Man, that is absurd! Pierre never looks at another woman."

"I did not say that she is jealous of Pierre MacKim," returned the factor. "That is not at all what I mean to imply. The fact is, she is sick of Pierre and his attentions. She wants him out of the way—and he is too great a fool to see it. She has set her wild fancy on some one else."

Westley laughed derisively.

"On Steve Canadian, I suppose?" he jeered.

"No," replied Grant. "No, not on the poor, drunken, homeless Indian. Guess again, Westley."

Westley guessed; and his face hardened and his eyes shone.

"Grant, you are talking like a fool," he said quietly. "You do not believe what you say any more than I do. You know, as well as I do, that the girl did not try to kill Pierre MacKim. I cannot think of your reason for wanting to saddle her with the crime, and I am as greatly at a loss to see your object in wishing to protect Canadian."

"I do not want to saddle her with the crime," said the other.

"But why are you trying to shield Steve Canadian?"

"You can prove nothing against him," retorted Grant weakly.

"Perhaps not; but I intend to hunt him out of this country as surely as I own twenty thousand acres of it," replied Westley.

"Don't!" cried the factor, glancing up swiftly with a shadow of fear in his mild eyes.

"Don't?" repeated Westley in a hard, incredulous voice. "I don't understand you, Grant. There is something behind all this that I know nothing about—something not very creditable to you, I should say."

"You are right," said Grant, scarcely above a whisper. "So, for Heaven's sake, leave it at that!"

"Leave it at that? And let the fellow com-

mit murder?" retorted Westley angrily and disgustedly. "Man, you must be mad!"

"I will speak to him," said Grant nervously. "I give you my word, Westley, that he'll not lift his hand against Pierre again—while I am here, anyway. I swear it. I'll try to get him out of the country."

"What is his hold on you?" asked Westley.

Grant groaned and hid his face between his thin hands.

"Tell me," said the other, "or I will hunt him down and take him before the nearest magistrate on the charge of attempted murder."

"Don't!" cried the factor. "Westley, you don't know what you threaten. I beg you to be merciful. I give you my word of honor that the Indian will do no more harm in this country. Yes, he has a hold on me—a stranglehold, Heaven help me!"

"What is it?" asked Westley, moved deeply by pity, suspicion, and curiosity.

"My name is not Grant," replied the other dully. "I am supposed to be dead. Steve Canadian knows me for the man who was reported as dead. He knows too much. I have kept his mouth shut. If I were possessed of more nerve I—I'd have killed him long ago. To arrest him now would mean my ruin—now, when the door of escape is half open to me."

"So you came here under a false name, to escape from disgrace," said Westley. "How did you manage to hoodwink the H. B. C.?"

"It was done for me—by some of my relatives, I think—anyway, for the sake of the family."

"And you are supposed to be dead? And Steve Canadian knows all this? And you are living in daily terror that he may tell what he knows. Heavens, man, it must be a black disgrace!"

"It was called cowardice," replied the factor bitterly.

"It happened in South Africa. Our commanding officer was my own uncle. The senior subaltern of my company—I was a captain—was my younger brother. In one hellish minute both the family and the regiment were disgraced.

"The regiment wiped out the blot with new deeds of valor and bloodshed; and my supposed death, suffered on the very field of disgrace, left my memory clean. I had paid the price, d'you see? That was the idea.

"Dead, I am pitied as one who showed the white feather in a moment of weakness, and then, in remorse, threw his life away uselessly and courageously. But alive?—ah, you can imagine it!

"I am dead. I paid the price. I died on the field of action—and the bones of some poor devil of a private soldier rot in my grave. So it was managed by my uncle and my brother, to save the reputations of the family and the regiment—and I am dead! But Donald Grant still lives.

"Don't you see? Grant the factor lives here at Two Moose now; but Grant the novelist will live in the world of men and cities. Donald Grant's name must not be associated with that of the poor devil who died in South Africa."

"So you are a coward," was Westley's comment.

"I have imagination," replied the other bitterly. "It was stronger than my training and my sense of duty when the rifles and machine-guns opened upon us, and men of my company fell on this side and that, broken, shattered, riddled, with froth and congested blood fluttering between their blue lips. Heavens!—I had never been under fire before."

Westley's heart failed him and was twisted with pity.

"But how comes it that Steve Canadian knows all this?" he asked.

"He used to live in Newfoundland, and I had once employed him as a guide there, on a trip up country after caribou. Some years later,

and after my disgrace and supposed death, he took a subaltern of the old regiment into the woods.

"This boy had joined since my time; but when Canadian heard the name of his regiment he asked when I was coming to Newfoundland again. The subaltern knew the story, of course, of my brief fit of cowardice and my courageous death, and he told it to the Indian—told it, and all that it meant.

"When Steve Canadian came into this country a few months ago, he knew me the first moment he set eyes on me, despite my beard and change of name."

Both men were silent after that for several minutes. The factor had turned his chair around, and now sat with his face to the window and his shoulder to Westley. Westley was the first to break the painful silence.

"If I can pull Pierre through, I'll not disturb Steve Canadian," he said gently.

The factor nodded his head without turning. He did not speak.

"By the way, if you were killed in your first engagement, how do you happen to be wearing medal-loops on your evening coat?" asked Westley.

"It is not my coat," replied Grant wearily. "Some things were sent out to me by my people—by those of my family who know—and

very likely the coat is an old one of my father's or my uncle's. I did not notice the loops until that night you spoke of them. I have cut them off since."

Westley got to his feet and moved around the end of the table.

"I am sorry, Grant," he said slowly and awkwardly. "It was bad luck—the worst in the world—and all imagination and nerves, as you say.

"What you have told me is safe with me, be sure of that. I don't consider you a coward—and I know that when you hinted that thing about Marie you did not expect me to believe it.

"You must think of some way of keeping Steve in hand, though; and you will have to appoint a new mail-runner immediately. I hope you'll get out into the world again. Shake on it."

The factor turned in his chair and stood up. He grasped Westley's hand, pressed it hard and swiftly, breathing unevenly.

"Thanks," he said nervously. "You—you are a good chap."

Then he left the room without another word or glance.

Westley went back to his own cabin and the wounded man. His heart was sore with pity for the factor of Two Moose.

He found both Pierre and Dominic asleep,

the first in his bed on the floor, the second in a chair. By such signs as an extra blanket over the wounded man, a rosary between the slack fingers, and a roll of clean linen on the table, he guessed that the mother had come and gone.

He aroused the Frenchman, and asked about the patient and his medical treatment. Dominic was not anxious. He smiled knowingly, and assured Westley that the wounded man would be as smart as a chipmunk within three weeks' time.

"Ol' Dominic Benoit one mighty fine doctor," he said.

So Westley left Pierre's case in the hands of Rosie MacKim and Dominic. Marie visited the sufferer once a day.

The work of his great undertaking was now crowding Westley. From dawn till dark he was busy with Duff and the men of the camps. The sledges were built on which the boiler and machinery for the new mill were to be hauled in from St. Anne's.

Then the seventy-five-mile snowshoe journey was made. Duff, Westley, and a couple of the bosses went ahead, choosing the route. All the men of the two lumber-camps followed, tramping four abreast and dragging the sledges. The largest sled, which came last, was weighted with logs. The smaller sledges were loaded with tents, blankets, food, and cooking outfits for the whole crew.

They made thirty miles the first day, and went into camp with ten men limping and stiff with snowshoe cramp. They halted more frequently the next day, and so did only twenty miles.

On the third day they pressed ahead at the best pace they could manage, with their cramped companions on the big sled in the places of the sticks of timber. Shortly before sundown they hauled into the astonished village of St. Anne's, leaving behind them a broad and beaten track leading all the way back, seventy-five miles across the wilderness to the site of the new mill on the bank of Smoky River, beyond Two Moose.

Three days from Two Moose to St. Anne's with loaded sledges! This was a record. In the eyes of the inhabitants of the village, David Westley was a hero, Mr. Duff was a hero, all the bosses and all the men were heroes.

The boiler and all the gear for the mill was ready. Duff told Westley that the men should have a day's rest before loading and starting the homeward trip. Westley agreed with him; and then the rest and the trouble began. A northern lumber-jack's idea of rest is a queer and fearful thing.

Westley's husky lads fell singly, in pairs, in squads, and in companies. If they had fallen to lie still it would not have been so bad, but they fell only to rise again, to face the enemy

again, and to fall again. Westley, Duff, and the foremen of the camps, the notary and the mill-owner of the village, went among them and did what they could to stay and turn the flood of foolishness and disorder.

Many hard blows were struck; many bottles were broken against the frosty walls of the little houses in which they had been bought.

Even so, it was not until the morning of the fourth day after their arrival that they set out on the return trip. Fortunately, new snow had fallen during the three days of uproar; but it was a damaged, sore-looking company that put forth with the loaded sledges. The poison had done its work, and at the signs of it—red eyes, swollen faces, and shaking knees—David Westley swore bitterly.

Men fell over their own snowshoes in the level track, and scrambled up, cursing. One of the smaller sleds served for an ambulance. Westley brought up the rear of the remorseful column. Nine miles was the distance covered that day between sunup and sundown.

They made better time next day; and by the third day out from St. Anne's the men were in fair condition again. They ate like wolves and worked like dogs now—and the joke of it was that the majority of them thought they had enjoyed themselves in St. Anne's.

Even under the swiftly improving conditions,

the homeward journey, with the heavy loads and the long though gradual upgrade, proved a formidable task. On the sixth morning out from St. Anne's, and when they were within seven miles of the end of their journey, they were met by a runner from Two Moose.

This runner was a half-breed lad. He told Westley, in broken English, that Dominic Benoit had sent him to say that Pierre MacKim was very bad with fever—very bad—and that he, Dominic, could do no more, and would be glad to hand over the case to a real doctor. Westley questioned the lad closely, then called Duff to him and talked earnestly for a minute or two.

"Oh, don't worry about the mill!" said Duff. "I can land the gear right where you want it, and set it up in a couple of days—and the men are mild as partridges now. But what about you? Man, you must be dog-sick of this trail!

"And to turn now, within a few miles of home. You must be mighty fond of that fellow Pierre. Oh, yes, he is a good enough breed, as breeds go; but you wouldn't catch me turning round now and hoofing it all the way back to St. Anne's for half a dozen like him. We'll be having snow before night, too. And the doctor at St. Anne's isn't worth a fiddler, anyway."

"Of course I am going back," said Westley.

"Any man would do it; you would yourself if I didn't. I can't let Pierre die for want of a doctor. I'll make up a pack now and take this young fellow along with me. All the business is in your hands until I get back, Duff—and have an eye on Pierre, will you? Try to keep him alive until I get back with the doctor. I don't quite trust Dominic Benoit as a medical man. I should have stayed and looked after the poor fellow myself."

"Well, you're your own master," replied Duff none too cheerfully. "Hoof it back to St. Anne's if you want to. Oh, yes, I'll take a look at the sick man!"

So David Westley and the lad turned and started back along the wide, white trail. Before Duff, Westley had pretended to accept this extra journey quite as a matter of course; but beneath a calm and undismayed exterior he felt anger and chagrin as well as pity for Pierre.

He was tired—weary of the white trail, of the black forests, of the glare and the cold. For days he had been looking forward to the comfort of his little cabin, to the cheery activities of putting up the mill, to his books and a talk with the factor—yes, and in his weaker moments he had thought with a certain glow, half of shame and half of pleasure, of seeing Marie Benoit again.

For a mile or two he walked in silence, smok-

ing his pipe, with the silent half-breed at his heels. It was the lad who spoke first.

"The factor, he make me new mail-runner," he said—"me, Gabe Bear."

"That so? Pretty good job, I suppose," replied Westley, awaking from his reveries.

"Fine," said Gabe. "I get him now I keep him always. Pierre, he mighty bad. He don't get well. He never run dis trail agin—Pierre."

"How is Marie?" asked Westley, glancing sidewise at the other.

"She fret some, yes; but she get plenty smarter feller nor Pierre MacKim. You bet! She fret now—some. She heap sorry 'bout Pierre get knifed; but she don't holler like Rosie MacKim."

"I am afraid Marie is like some other pretty girls—a trifle heartless," remarked the New Yorker grimly.

"Maybe, I dunno," returned Gabe Bear.

Snow commenced to fall before they made camp beside the trail that night. They built a little shelter of spruce boughs, with a great fire in front of it. They got into their sleeping-bags early.

Westley sank to sleep almost instantly, hazily thinking of Marie and Pierre.

But he dreamed of Dorothy Gordon. It was a wonderful dream, though broken, absurd, and meaningless, as most dreams are. Yet it was

vivid, and its absurdities seemed more real than reality.

In one of the wildly mixed scenes of this dream he was lost in a terrible, daunting swamp of dead tamaracks. He wandered here and there, as terrified as a child would be, seeking a way out and battling blindly with the black mud, the dead branches and gray moss. And at last he heard a voice, faint and far away.

He struggled toward it, shouting in reply. The voice sounded again, a little stronger, a little nearer, and sweetly familiar. He knew that it was the voice of a friend—but he could not remember the name or face of the friend. He struggled onward, guided by the voice.

At last he came to higher, firmer ground and fell, exhausted. Some one lifted him from the ground, and he saw the face of Dorothy close above him.

Westley remembered nothing more than that part of the dream when he awoke in the morning. It caused him some bitter and disturbing reflections as he ate his breakfast by the fire in the snow.

"Dreams are just the foolish, mad things that a man has sense enough not to think when he is awake," he said to Gabe Bear.

"I guess so. I dunno," replied the half-breed.

CHAPTER XII

THE GORDONS GO NORTH

Far away from Two Moose and Smoky River, in the clanging city of New York, Mr. John Angus Gordon lost sleep and flesh from worrying about his daughter. The girl was not her old self. Her gaiety struck her anxious father as being as forced as it was infrequent.

Still she went the rounds of dinners and dances; still she kept up the fiction, to the people whom she met week after week, of knowing where David Westley was and of corresponding with him. Mr. Gordon tried to persuade her to go to Florida with her aunt; to Bermuda; to California; to the south of England; to the south of France.

He offered himself as her companion. He sent for his son, Tom, who was ripening a liberal education somewhere in Europe. The honest man was thoroughly frightened.

He had lost hope of straightening matters with the assistance of Captain Joice; for Joice had gone away from the city, no one knew where, shortly after Christmas. The entire

weight of Dorothy's unhappiness lay on his own broad shoulders.

Dorothy's change of front seemed very sudden to her father. It came upon him so suddenly that he was at a loss to know whether to rejoice over it or to regret it. She appeared at breakfast one morning with shadowed eyes and paler cheeks than usual.

"You must let people know that all is over between David and me," she said quietly. "It will have to be given to the press, I suppose, for our engagement was published. I have been thinking it over all night. That is the only thing to do. You will see to it, dear?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Gordon. "It seems to me rather a late day to—to tell the truth about it. So this is the end of it?"

"No," she replied. "No, this is not the end of it—as far as I am concerned, at least. But people must be told that this is the end of it. I am tired—tired."

Mr. Gordon shook his head. He looked anxious, bewildered, and dejected—and no wonder. He longed for Walter Joice.

"I don't understand," he said. "What am I to tell the—the newspaper-reading public? The truth? The belated truth. It will sound queer, coming so late—months after it happened."

"We have agreed to break the—engagement," said Dorothy. "I do not approve of his life—

of his devotion to hunting and exploration. I want him to spend his time in New York, and he wants to spend it all in out-of-the-way corners of the earth. Surely that sounds reasonable. That is all the inquisitive people need know. That is what they must think. It is no more unjust to either of us than the truth."

"That is rather clever," said Mr. Gordon. "But what is the truth?"

"The truth is that it is all a fearful mistake," replied the girl unsteadily. "We were both thoughtless—and selfish. I pretended not to care—as I really cared. Perhaps David did the same. It is the smart thing nowadays—to pretend not to care. I am sure he—does not know how fond I am of him. If he knew—he would come back. He—loved me. And I—love him. And I have not given him up."

"And yet people are to be told that you have given him up?" said the bewildered father.

"Yes. What does it matter what they think? It will give me a chance to—rest. I am tired."

And with that Dorothy put her hands before her face and began to cry quietly, bitterly.

John Angus sprang from his armchair, knocking a spoon from the table and overturning a silver toast-rack with the morning paper which he held gripped in his hand. He trembled from top to toe, and his face was very red.

"Don't do that—don't cry!" he exclaimed.

"Lord, I can't stand it. And Wilkes may come in with more toast—or one of the maids. Come, now, cheer up, there's a good girl! What d'you want? What d'you want me to do? Shall I go look for Westley? Just say the word, and stop crying, and I'll go. I'll go right around to Westley's house and take that confounded smug man of his by the gizzard and twist the address out of him. Then I'll go find Westley, if it takes me to the end of the world, by thunder, and bring him back to you by the scuff of the neck —if he won't come any other way."

Dorothy raised her face from her hands and brushed away the tears with a scrap of lace and fine linen. Gordon returned to his chair breathless and not a little ashamed of his outbreak.

"You must not go to his house," she said. "You must not even question David's servant. Will you promise?"

"I promise," he replied. "Arrange it to suit yourself."

"I want you to take me away—away from New York," she said.

"I'll do it, Dot; but let us wait for Tom. His boat is due in a couple of days. Then we'll go —well, where you say. What's your idea?"

"Yes, we'll wait for Tom, and take him with us."

"South, or east, or west—where shall we go?"

"North."

"North? This time of year? Ah, so you know where David is, do you? And—and you have so little self-respect that you mean to go hunting for him, and take the family along with you? Hang it all, Dot, that's not like you. I gave you credit for more pride than that."

The girl's eyes brightened, and her pale cheeks flushed red.

"Pride?" she queried. "Oh, my dear father, let us have done with all talk of pride. Self-respect? That is quite another thing—and I assure you that I am not lacking in self-respect.

"If I knew where to find David, I should certainly go to him—and if he is what I think him, I should tell him the truth. But I do not know where to find him. He is somewhere in Canada, in the woods. I have no intention of hunting for him; but I want to go north.

"I want to get away from this town—I want to find rest—rest—if only for a few weeks. Snow and miles of black forests sound restful to me. We shall see them from the windows of the train—and perhaps we can stop off at some little snow-bound village for a few days. Tom would like that. He might be able to get some shooting."

She gazed pleadingly at her father, her eyes still glistening with tears.

He shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I am sorry I spoke

harshly—and unjustly. Of course we'll take a little jaunt north. We'll stop off somewhere and give Tom some shooting, if the season is still open, and we'll spend a week in the city of Quebec.

"That's a fine old town—and, now that I come to think of it, I have some business there. It is land and lumber business, and I was thinking of sending young Turner to see to it—but I can do it as well myself. Why, of course we'll go north. I am glad you suggested it, Dot."

He left his chair, walked around the table, and kissed his daughter. He patted her cheek with his square, strong, soft hand. His eyes became suddenly dim.

"You know that I don't mean to be a—beast," he said thickly. "I am worried. I think only of what is best for you. Happiness is best for you, my girl—and rest in the meantime."

The story that Miss Gordon and Mr. David Westley had agreed to disagree appeared in several newspapers both in America and England. The item explained, briefly and without comment, that Mr. Westley's devotion to exploration and the roughest kinds of outdoor sport, and Miss Gordon's fondness for the amusements of the social life of cities, were the causes of the broken engagement.

A good deal of talk followed. Some people

on the inside said that the story sounded decidedly fishy.

The editor of a weekly with a decidedly flagrant reputation was rash enough to mention Captain Walter Joice in connection with the affair.

John Angus Gordon called on that editor with his heaviest walking-stick—and the editor enjoyed a brief holiday in hospital which he had not expected. Of course, Mr. Gordon had to pay a fine.

Young Tom Gordon arrived in New York on time. He had heard from his father of the trouble between Dorothy and David Westley. He was a great admirer of Westley, and always maintained that he owed his life to that mighty hunter.

He was a well-set-up, long-limbed, good-natured youth, unspoiled by a life of ease and gentled by a knowledge of the world. He sent his boxes home, and went straight to his father's office.

In the office, behind a closed door, the two had a long and serious talk. They agreed that the wisest plan was to give Dorothy her head—within the bounds of reason, of course.

They agreed on everything, in fact, except their private opinions of David Westley. Mr. Gordon nursed a vague but stubborn grudge against Westley which Tom could not under-

stand and could not discover any reasonable cause for. John Angus was somewhat puzzled to account for it himself.

"The fact is, I never got on very well with David's father," he admitted. "The old man double-crossed me more than once. That is enough to sore me on the name—though of course the son had nothing to do with the father's business methods. I don't mind telling you, Tom, that I show a nasty spirit in feeling as I do about David Westley; and this row with Dorothy—whoever was in fault—hasn't made me like him any better.

"I haven't a doubt that it was largely Dot's fault; but what the deuce does he mean by hiding away in the woods and not answering her letters?

"Yes, I know she has written to him—more than once. She is a girl in a thousand—and she is my daughter. Do you expect me to sit down and say, 'It serves her right; God bless Westley'?

"Well, by thunder, you'll have to take it out in expectation! I'm not that kind. He is breaking her heart. What do I care whether she gave him cause or not? It is her heart I am thinking about."

"I think the fault must have been both of theirs, sir," replied Tom, "and I feel sure that Westley is convinced that she does not care

for him. I know that he was very fond of her —and he never struck me as the kind of man to change toward a woman. He has rather a headlong temper and a pretty snifty pride.

"I have an idea that Joice is the snag on which he has broken himself. Joice is a big chap— and there was a good deal of talk about him and Dorothy. I heard something of it in Paris. He is a marked man, you see. No one can blame him for tagging round after her in London; but he should have had more sense than to cross with her. He made a mistake, and she made a mistake—and very likely poor old Westley made half a dozen mistakes. He is making them now, I suppose, poor chap. That's the way I feel about the affair, sir—and I think it is all a shame!"

"It is," said John Angus. "I am sorry for both of them—and I am sorry for Joice, too. He is a good fellow, that Walter Joice. I like him. But I see that the best thing he can do is to get over his infatuation as quickly as he knows how; and I must give all my attention to making things easier for Dorothy. We'll go at it shoulder to shoulder, Tom. She'll find that she has a father and a brother, anyway, who can be depended on."

Two days later the three Gordons left New York for the north, leaving behind them a great deal of unsatisfied curiosity and, as I

have already stated, an indiscreet editor in hospital.

From Boston they ran comfortably to Montreal; from Montreal, after a day's rest, to the ancient city of Quebec.

Dorothy had a strong will, and forced herself to rest. She dreamed and she waited, resting. It was better to dream than to think; and here—away from the stir and familiar, meaningless activities of a spendthrift and shallow society—she found it easy to dream.

From the windows of the gliding car she looked out upon vastnesses of snow and timber, looming hills and shrouded barrens. Looking, she understood how a strong man might find refuge from the life of cities in such places as these. And in Quebec she found rest and a measure of contentment in the novelty of scene and atmosphere. She and Tom drove upon the great river and abroad through the surrounding country every morning, while Mr. Gordon attended to his business.

In the afternoons all three drove together, or skated, or explored the old French quarters of the town.

So four days passed, and by the end of that time Mr. Gordon was through with his business.

It was just twelve o'clock noon of the fourth day when he concluded the sale of a block of land and tucked the check away in his pocket-

book. He went out into the bright street, very well satisfied with himself, and decided to hunt about for some quiet place where he had never lunched before and could now lunch alone.

He had sold the land well for the man in New York who owned it, and, incidentally, very well for himself. He paused on the sunlit pavement, breathing deep of the frosty air, and glancing down the street. He had heard of a small French hotel down there, where the cooking was done by a plump gentleman who had refused offers to manage the kitchens and ranges of a dozen great hotels. So he had been told.

Was it three blocks down the hill, or only two? He would go back into the office he had just left and inquire. He turned to do so, and came face to face with Captain Walter Joice.

"Joice! Bless my soul! What are you doing in Quebec?" he exclaimed heartily, pulling off a fur-lined glove and thrusting out his hand.

The Englishman had a book under his left arm. In his astonishment he dropped it. He grasped Gordon's hand, then stooped and recovered the book.

"I didn't expect to find you here, Mr. Gordon," he said.

"Came on business," replied Gordon. "Sold some timber-lands for a friend of mine to an English concern. My son and daughter are

with me. Am on my way to lunch now. Come along."

"Come with me," said Joice. "I have been here before, and know the places to eat."

They walked down the street together. Gordon glanced keenly at his companion.

"You are not looking very fit," he said. Then he reddened. "I have been wondering where you had gone to. So you have been here in Quebec all the time? Well, it is a pleasant little city."

"I have been in England," said Joice. "I only arrived here yesterday. I—I have seen the New York papers. May I ask if there is any truth in their story—about—your daughter."

"It is a blind," replied Gordon. "We have heard nothing of Westley, and she has not given him up. But her position in town became unbearable. I hope, Joice, that—that things are well with you."

"Thanks, I have been enjoying myself more or less," replied Joice. "That is, I have been busy—with family matters."

They found the French hotel, but the meal was not a cheerful one.

Neither of the men felt at his ease. They tried to make talk of things of which they were not thinking. They parted at the door of the hotel.

Mr. Gordon gave his address and asked Joice to call. Joice replied, somewhat uncertainly, that he would try to call next day. Then each went on his separate way. Mr. Gordon felt depressed.

Joice went straight to his room in the quiet hotel where he was staying, threw off his overcoat, and sat down with the book which he had been carrying. It was a new book, and a work of fiction. The first page of the first chapter had caught his eye in a book-shop. Now he read the entire chapter with care, slowly and eagerly.

"It is the same," he said. "It is the beginning of one of the yarns poor old Dick used to tell. Dick had promise. I wonder what it means? And who the deuce is Donald Grant?"

CHAPTER XIII

DAVID FINDS A DOCTOR

Walter Joice did not go to bed until past midnight, for he was a slow reader. There were certain chapters of this new book, which had excited his curiosity so, which he read three times over.

"It is Dick's story," he said. "Whole scenes of it are just as Dick used to tell it at school. No two men could happen upon the same ideas like that.

"But Dick is dead, poor chap, and buried along with twenty others. I was in command of the firing party that pulled off the three rounds over the trench. But this is one of Dick's stories. I suppose one of the other fellows who heard him tell it has written it. A dashed low thing to do! Donald Grant? I should like to have a few words with this Mr. Donald Grant, whoever he is."

So he wrote to the publishers of the book, requesting the address of Mr. Donald Grant.

"Poor old Dick," he reflected. "Here I've just come in for a bunch of money which would have been his if he had lived, and here is this

fellow Grant getting away with his literary fame."

He decided not to call upon the Gordons, but he wrote a note to Dorothy. All he said in the note was: "I have heard nothing of David Westley. Business took me home, but now I mean to look for David in earnest."

That was all. Dorothy felt very miserable and guilty after reading it.

Mr. Gordon grew suddenly tired of Quebec. His pity for Joice was the cause of this. He had done his best to put heart and hope in the Englishman, months ago, in New York, and now he had deserted the honest fellow's cause.

But what else could he do? Joice's cause was hopeless. Of this he was convinced. He had been indiscreet before, and now he felt like a traitor. As he could not help Joice he was anxious to get away from him.

So he remembered some property which he owned several hundred miles to the westward of Quebec, on the main line of railway. He had never seen this property, and had never felt any particular interest in it before. It had always ranked in his mind as one of his mistakes.

Yes, even John Angus Gordon sometimes made mistakes. He had bought this property, ten years before, from a young man whom he liked and who needed the money. He had remembered it once a year since then when he

had paid the taxes on it to the Canadian Government. He decided to go now and see just how badly the young man had done him on the deal.

So the Gordons packed their bags and boxes and started westward from Quebec.

David Westley and Gabe Bear went forward toward St. Anne's at top speed along the beaten track. Snow fell for a few hours on the second day, and the skies remained threatening until they reached the village, late in the afternoon of the third day. Then the snow came down again, silent and thick.

The two went straight to the doctor's house, but the doctor, an unworthy member of a worthy brotherhood, was in no condition to make a journey or to practise. The tide of riotousness that had flooded into the village with the lumbermen had swamped the doctor.

It seems that he had tried to collect an account —perhaps a fancied account—from one of those sons of the wild, and now he lay in his bed, with his head in bandages, and requested all and sundry to go to the deuce with their ailments.

Westley was furious, but he kept himself well in hand. After examining the doctor, in spite of that gentleman's protests, he had to admit that the poor fellow was of no use to any one.

He hastened to the owner of the mill, who was also the sheriff of the county.

"Where can I find a doctor?" he asked. "I have been to Jessop. I need one badly, and in a hurry. Jessop is trying to recover from a jag and a fight."

"Ask me something easier, Mr. Westley," returned the sheriff.

"When does the express go through the junction?" asked Westley.

"West-bound at nine o'clock to-night, if she's on time, and east-bound at twelve-thirty. The chances are that they'll both be late. A lot of snow is falling, and this road is a bad one for drifts."

Westley looked at his watch. It was six o'clock.

"You have a telephone to Musquash, I think," he said.

"Yes," replied Brown. "Sixty-five miles of good line, if it isn't down anywhere. The men haven't been over it this week, I guess. I look after the five miles between here and the junction. What are you thinking of doing, Mr. Westley?"

"Does the west-bound stop at Musquash?"

"Yes, for fifteen minutes, if she don't happen to be in any particular hurry. You won't find a doctor at Musquash."

"But there may be one on the train. I can

'phone to the station-master to inquire, and if there is one, to ask him to stop off at the junction. They'd let a doctor off, I suppose?"

"Yes, I reckon they'd let a doctor off if he had the nerve to make them. And the chances are good that there'd be a doctor aboard her. There are a heap of doctors in the world, and a good many of them on the move, heading westward. Who's sick up your way, anyhow?"

"A friend of mine."

"What, the factor?"

"No, a young fellow called Pierre MacKim."

"Heavens! A half-breed!"

"Even so, Sheriff Brown. I think I mentioned the fact that he is a friend of mine. I hope you have no objections."

"You'd better come into the office now, Mr. Westley, and try the line," said Brown hastily.

Westley tried the line. He could not get a reply from Musquash.

"Down somewheres, I guess," said Brown.

Westley swore softly, and muttered something concerning telephone wires that are allowed to get out of order which Sheriff Brown was wise enough to pretend not to hear. Brown was not as courageous as sheriffs are popularly supposed to be.

"You can send a telegram, Mr. Westley," he said soothingly. "You can drive out to the junction and get the operator there—Jones by

name—to get into communication with Musquash. I'll lend you a horse and pung. The road will be a bit heavy with this snow, but it has a good bottom. I was hauling over it last week."

Westley accepted the mill-owner's offer, and without waiting for anything to eat, set out along the five miles of hauling-road for the so-called junction.

Sunpoke Junction was no longer a real junction of railroads. At one time, years ago, a couple of short spurs had been run into the wilderness from the main line at this point, for lumbering purposes.

These spurs had tapped a couple of pine belts, and when the pine had been hauled out the rails and ties had been allowed to rust, and rot, and crumble back to wilderness stuff.

Now the junction was nothing more than a siding used by Brown for his sawn lumber, a water-tank sometimes used by freight-trains, a jumping-off place for moose-hunters, timber-cruisers, and the like, and a small, red shack in which Mr. Jones spent a dreary existence with his crackling instruments, his chewing-tobacco, his dog, his cat, and his dreams of some day being transferred to some other field of activity.

Westley drove out alone through the snow and dark, with a stable lantern lashed to the

dashboard of the pung. The road was heavy with new-fallen snow, but sound at the bottom.

It led through a desolate waste of swamp, of lands scarred by ax and fire, of rotten stumps and bleached "windfalls," all shrouded in snow. No gleam of lamp-lit windows broke the night along that way. It was dead-land—a no-man's land.

Westley hunched himself in his great coat of coon skins and tickled the sheriff's horse into a galloping trot. The horse, like the road, was heavy, but sound.

Beside the telegraph-operator's shack was an open freight-shed in which provisions and goods for the village of St. Anne's sometimes rested overnight. In this shed Westley hitched the horse, blanketing him without taking him from the shafts of the pung.

Then he went to the door of the shack and thumped upon it with his fur-clad knuckles. Dogs barked within, and Mr. Jones opened the door cautiously.

This Jones was a pale young man with long, agile fingers, and a toothful of tobacco in his left cheek. Behind him a couple of dogs barked and jumped about, three cats arched their backs, and the telegraph instruments on the table at the head of the bunk crackled busily. Westley stepped inside, a daunting figure in his bulky furs. Jones retreated before him.

"My name is Westley," he said, pulling off his cap. Then he stated his case. Jones fell into a flutter of excitement. It takes very little to excite a man who lives at Sunpoke Junction. He wanted to help Westley off with his coat.

"Never mind me," said Westley. "Get Musquash."

"Oh, I forgot," replied Jones nervously. "The express left Musquash ten minutes ago. Say, that's too bad, Mr. Westley. I don't know if there was a doctor aboard her or not. She was sharp on time. Likely there would be a doctor—maybe more than one."

"The deuce," exclaimed Westley. "Confound that horse of Brown's. Then there is nothing for me to do but stop the train."

He glanced at the clock on the table, then threw off his coat, and produced his cigarette-case.

"Surely you're jokin', Mr. Westley," said Jones anxiously. "Why, it's against the law to stop the express for—for a private matter. That's the truth, sir. If it was yourself needed the doctor—But to hold up the express for Pierre MacKim! Say, there'd be a row!"

Westley offered him the open case, and he accepted a fat Turkish cigarette with an air of flattered self-consciousness which the New Yorker would have found amusing if he had noticed it.

But he did not notice it. He was thinking of Pierre MacKim, away back in the little cabin at Two Moose, on Smoky River. Pierre needed a doctor—unless he was already everlastingly past the need of one—and a doctor he should have. He lit a cigarette and for half a minute smoked reflectively. He glanced up suddenly at Jones.

"What have you to eat?" he asked. "I am hungry."

Jones stirred up the fire in the sheet-iron stove, filled the kettle with fresh water, and put on the frying-pan. Westley watched him, unseeingly. When the fried ham and tea were ready he ate and drank heartily and thankfully. Then he donned his fur cap and coat.

"Where are you going, Mr. Westley?" asked Jones suspiciously.

"I suppose I may as well start back for St. Anne's," replied the other. "I don't see much object in staying here."

Jones eyed him respectfully and doubtfully.

"I hope you're not still thinkin' of holdin' up the train, sir," he said. "That would be against the law, Mr. Westley, and they'd make you pay for it—the road would. And you see, Mr. Westley, as an official of the road, it would be my duty to stop you if you tried to do it—by force, Mr. Westley, if need be."

He looked nervous and uncomfortable as he

made this statement. The big man from Smoky River smiled kindly at Mr. Jones's pale face, slight frame, and narrow shoulders.

"Do I look like a law-breaker?" he queried. "After all, as you say, Pierre MacKim is only a half-breed. So I may as well get along. Many thanks for the supper. We'll meet again, I hope."

He shook hands with Jones, took up his lighted lantern from the floor, and went out. The snow was still falling thickly. He went to the freight-shed, loosed the horse from the shafts so that it could lie down if it wanted to, strapped an extra rug across its back, and gave it a feed of oats from a bag which Brown had put into the pung.

Then he extinguished the lantern, and, carrying it in his hand, he left the shed and made his way cautiously to the track between its plow-reared banks of snow. To do this he gave the operator's shack a wide berth.

Over the ties and the rails the new snow lay about five inches deep. The footing beneath was solid and smooth, but slippery. Westley walked eastward at a brisk pace.

The line, with its high walls of packed snow, curved sharply. All around and above lay the black sky, the black forests, white barrens, and burnt lands. All was wilderness, as God had made it for the most part; but a few thousands

of acres of it had taken on an added desolation where man had scarred it.

Mr. Jones, in his red shack, the freight-shed and the black bulk of the water-tank were the nearest things that stood for civilization. But Westley had left these things behind him, beyond the curve.

He halted and lit his lantern. The yellow light swam over the level white at his feet, and up the white, slanting walls on either hand. He saw fresh imprints in the snow before him—the hoof-marks of two running deer.

A few yards farther along he saw where the animals had left the trench of the road and jumped the bank on the left. They had broken a wedge-shaped hole in the top of the wall of packed snow, and kicked a heap of snow back onto the track.

"This will do as well as any place," said Westley, "and I think it is far enough away from Mr. Jones to be safe."

He scrambled heavily up the way the deer had jumped. He found himself in a thicket of spruces and young birches. Plunging here and there in the snow, waist-deep, he gathered rolls of birch bark and branches of spruce and fir. It was hard work. At last he slid back to the track, breathless, with the bark and branches clutched to his breast.

He brought down about half a ton of caked

snow with him. He heaped the bark and branches in the middle of the track, at a point about fifteen yards to the east of the breech which he and the jumping deer had made in the wall.

"It's just as well to leave a way of retreat wide open in case my signal does not stop the train," he said.

Then he went back to the woods and gathered more brush. After arranging the brush and bark so that it would spring into flame in an instant, he set the lantern down, squatted beside it, dug out his pipe and tobacco, and began to smoke.

The snow was still falling thickly and softly. The wilderness was as silent as death. Westley looked at his watch in the lantern light, then listened for a sound to the eastward with straining ears. He began to feel a slight uneasiness—a dryness of tongue and throat, and a consciousness of the thumping of his heart.

After all, this stopping of an express train in the dark and the wilderness, in the middle of nowhere, full-flighted for the great West, with its freight of men and women, its snug parlor-cars and Pullmans, its kitchens and dining rooms, and crowded colonist cars, might be a matter of some seriousness.

It would likely be something more than a joke, anyway. To give himself courage, West-

ley pictured Pierre. He unfastened his outer coat, and drew forth a fat wallet. From this he produced and counted a number of Canadian bank bills. He made up two wads of these, and placed one in the right-hand pocket of his fur coat, and the other in the left-hand pocket.

"These are the only weapons I can use in this case," he reflected, "and I think no others would prove so effective."

Presently he heard a sound, a large, vague sound, far away.

"She's coming," he said. "If she carries a doctor Pierre will have the benefit of his knowledge—if the poor chap is still alive. Well, here goes."

Again he felt the dryness of mouth and throat, and the thumping of his heart. He had faced real and outlandish dangers without these sensations; but never before had he even contemplated the holding-up of an express train in the middle of the wilderness and the night.

Danger he did not fear—and in this adventure there would be no physical risk—but it smacked to him something of kicking up a disturbance in a city street.

It was lawless, both in letter and spirit. And it contained a decided risk of publicity—and publicity was a thing that he had a poor conceit

of. But the big, vague sound was gathering and growing on the night.

He struck a match, stooped and held it to the edge of a roll of dry bark at the bottom of the pile of brush. The little, yellow flame hung smokily on the edge of the bark for a moment, then crawled upward and inward with an air of assurance, and set the green spruce crackling and roaring.

Flames brust forth on all sides, and red sparks puffed aloft, and sailed among the descending snow flakes. Red shadows wavered and spread along the white track and up the white walls. Westley stepped back, lantern in hand, turned and stared eastward. An illumination, like a white shadow, grew up upon the blackness far down the trench of the straight track.

The fire was a great cone of red coals, topped by thin, yellow flames, by the time the great engine came to a protesting halt within ten yards of it. As Westley sprang up the steps of one car, the conductor of the train sprang down into the snow from the steps of another. Westley found that he had happened upon the highly polished and heavily upholstered smoke room in the end of a Pullman. This was what he wanted.

He pushed along the narrow corridor, still

with his lantern in his hand, and pulled aside the heavy curtains which hung across the doorway of the smoker. Early as it was, most of the passengers of the car had retired to their berths. Five men sat in the smoker, in blue haze of tobacco-smoke. Their eyes were upon him with looks of startled intentness, and their cigars were in their hands. Westley's glance was swift from face to face. He knew none of them.

"Is there a doctor in this car?" he asked.

Four continued to stare, but one nodded, uncrossed his legs, and sat up alertly. Westley noted this, and stepped forward.

"I have a case for you, doctor," he said, earnestly. "Please get your bag—what you need—and come along with me. I am in a hurry, as you may imagine."

"That sounds in my line," replied the doctor, who was a young man with a frank and pleasing face; "but what is the case, and where are we?"

"We are at a place called Sunpoke Junction," replied Westley, "and the case is a serious one—and is away back in the woods from here."

"Huh!" exclaimed one of the others. "Do you expect the doctor to lose his train—his trip westward—for some bush-whacker's bellyache?"

Westley slanted a cold eye at the speaker.

"I am talking to you, doctor," he said. "A friend of mine is sick, away back in the woods. The case will be well worth your while, even if it is too late to pull the poor chap through. If you are alone on the train, please get your bags and hurry up."

"Yes, I'm alone," said the doctor.

Westley turned, stepped into the corridor and moved along it to the door of the sleeping-car. The doctor threw away his cigar and followed him.

They entered the sleeper together, between the walls of curtained beds. They were faced by a black porter, to whom they paid no attention at the moment.

"This is my bed," said the doctor. "My bag is here; but my trunk is in the baggage car."

He looked doubtfully at Westley. David pulled a wad of bills from a pocket of his fur coat, and gazed at it reflectively. The young doctor and the porter also gazed at the bills.

"Never mind your trunk," said Westley. "Hurry up, for Heaven's sake!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHO RETURNS TO TWO MOOSE

"This is an unusual thing," said the young doctor. "If I go into the woods with you it will mean the upsetting of all my plans, and perhaps the loss of my baggage."

Westley pressed two yellowbacked bills into his hand.

"I am acting in good faith," he said. "Please accept this on account. Now hurry up, for Heaven's sake! The train may go on at any moment. It is a matter of life and death."

The doctor plunged his head between the curtains and began to pack his bag with frantic haste. Westley turned to the porter.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said. "I hope I have not awakened any of your passengers."

He slipped something into the man's hand. Then he walked back to the smoker, and in the curtained doorway was met by the fuming conductor and a brakeman or two.

"Ho!" exclaimed the conductor. "I guess you are the feller I'm lookin' for. Say, is that right?" He put out a hand and gripped the

front of Westley's coon-skin coat. "Is that right? Are you the ignorant, gum-heeled bush-whacker who built a fire in the middle of the track an' stopped this train?"

"I stopped the train," said Westley, keeping his temper admirably.

"You did, did you?" cried the other furiously. "That's what you consider a joke in these parts, I suppose. You won't think it such a joke when I hand you over to the police at the next town. I have a mind to plug you now, you big dub!"

At that moment the doctor appeared.

"I didn't stop your train for fun," said Westley. "I needed a doctor—and here he is."

"You'll need a doctor worse than you do now before I've finished with you. What's your name?"

"My name wouldn't interest you," replied Westley; "but this will, I think. It will repay you for your twenty minutes' delay."

He produced the second wad of bills and passed them deftly into the official's hand. The official's small, bright lantern flashed upon them for an instant. His mouth opened, his eyes bulged.

"Come on, doctor. Good night, all," said Westley.

Westley and the young doctor jumped and landed firmly, waist deep, in the snow-bank be-

side the track. The medical gentleman sank deeper than the capitalist, for he was freighted with a fat suit case and the heavy leather bag of his profession.

Westley had only the lantern. The great train rolled forward, its plow scattering and quenching the red coals and thin flames of the subsided fire.

And in one of the soft, curtained beds of that same car from which Westley had brought the doctor, Dorothy Gordon sighed and lowered her head again to the pillow. So it had been nothing but a dream, after all—a trick of the heart upon the brain in that happy, foolish stage halfway between sleeping and waking.

Something, perhaps the stopping of the train, had disturbed her slumber. In the half-dream that followed she had heard swift footsteps along the center of the car, and felt an air of suspense and excitement.

And presently she had heard voices—and then a voice she knew saying, "Hurry up, for Heaven's sake!" She had continued to lie with her eyes closed, more asleep than awake, until another voice—that of the night porter—had muttered close beside the curtain of her bed, "Bless mah soul, he give me twenty dollahs!"

Then she had opened her eyes and sat up in her berth. So the first voice had been nothing

but a trick of dream. She heard voices whispering up and down the car: "Why have we stopped here? What is the trouble?"

She heard her brother questioning the porter, and the porter's reply that a big bushman had stopped the train in the middle of nowhere and come aboard for a doctor. Oh, yes, he got what he wanted.

Then the train jerked heavily and moved forward. Dorothy's shade was up. For a second she saw, by the light of a stable lantern outside, two figures against the high, sloping wall of snow beside the track. One figure, that of the man who held the lantern, was big, wild, and in keeping with the wild and dreary background.

The yellow light shone upon the long fur of his great coat, and threw his shadow behind him as big as a moose.

She had seen hundreds of such coats in the country around Quebec. Lumber operators wore them, and country doctors, and rich farmers. So it had been nothing but a dream!

The train rolled on, gathering headway. She heard Tom's voice say: "Well, he had his nerve with him. But I am glad he got the doctor. I like a man who is big enough to get what he wants—even if he has to stop a train for it."

Then Dorothy lay back upon her pillows and

tried to recapture her broken slumber. But this she could not do immediately. There seemed to be a tingle of excitement in the air of the now silent car. The voice that had said, "Hurry up, for Heaven's sake!" continued to ring in her mind.

So she lay wide-eyed for an hour before sleep returned to her.

David Westley, blissfully unconscious of the proximity of the girl whose disloyalty had driven him, in bitternes of spirit, away from his old life and his old haunts clean up into the Smoky River country, stood waist deep in the snow-bank and gazed after the rear lights of the express until they vanished in the darkness to the westward.

The voice of the doctor brought him back to the business in hand; for the train had touched him to dreams and a twinge of covert desire for the old life of men and cities.

"Where is the patient?" queried the doctor.

"A long way from here, I am sorry to say," replied Westley, extricating himself from the hole in the snow and then giving a hand to the doctor.

Then he took one of the bags from his companion, and they started along the track toward Sunpoke Junction. The snow was still falling softly and silently. They went to the freight-

shed, Westley leading the way. They pulled the pung outside, led out the horse, took off his rug and blanket, and hitched him between the shafts.

They made considerable noise about all this, and the lantern flashed busily. They had taken their seats in the pung and tucked the robes about them, when the door of the red shack opened and Mr. Jones looked out.

"That you, Mr. Westley?" he asked. "I thought you had started back for St. Anne's long ago. What have you been doing out there all this time? Why didn't you come back in and sit by my fire?"

"I was getting the doctor," replied Westley. "I have him here."

"The doctor!" exclaimed Jones. He left the shack and walked over to the pung. "Well, I'll be jiggered!" he continued.

"Yes, I guess it's a doctor, sure enough—if you say so, Mr. Westley. But where did you get him from?"

"I don't think you'll hear anything about it from the railroad," answered Westley, "for I think the conductor will keep it quiet. But if any one asks you any questions, you'll oblige me greatly by keeping my name to yourself, Mr. Jones.

"The conductor of the train asked me for my name; but I gave him something which in-

terested him more. May I count on your silence—and your friendship. I don't want the thing to get into the papers, you know."

"So you stopped the express? And squared the conductor?" cried Jones.

"I knew you could do it if you set yourself to it, Mr. Westley. Yes, sir, you can count on me."

Then Westley whipped up the big horse. The heavy five miles to the village were covered for the most part in silence. It was close upon eleven o'clock when Westley handed the sweating horse over to Brown's stable-boy. He tipped the boy generously, told him to dry the horse thoroughly before blanketing him, and then to go and find Gabe Bear and tell that worthy to hurry to the store, with his pack all ready on his shoulders.

Then Westley got the keeper of the mill-store out of his bed, bought a pair of snow-shoes, moccasins, many pairs of woolen stockings, a blanket coat lined with sheep skin, a fur cap and gloves, and a sleeping-bag—all for the doctor.

The doctor accepted all in a dazed manner. Gabe appeared. A few additions to the "grub-bag" were made.

It was one o'clock—one hour past midnight—when the three set out on that long, wide trail which led, by snowy river and drifted portage, to the sick half-breed at Two Moose.

"This appears to be quite a considerable undertaking," remarked the doctor. "About how much farther do we have to go?"

"Seventy miles, more or less," replied Westley. "I am sorry it is so far. I was afraid to tell you the whole truth aboard the train. I thought you might funk it."

"I was looking for business," returned the doctor pluckily. "It is fortunate that I have walked on snowshoes before. I am a Montreal man, and my name is Francis Dixon."

"And mine is David Westley," said the big woodsman. "I am engaged in lumbering and that sort of thing, away back on Smoky River."

"David Westley," repeated the doctor. "Do you know, Mr. Westley, I was reading something about a man of your name in a New York paper, ten or twelve days ago."

"Is that so? What was it?" inquired Westley calmly.

"It was a notice of the termination of an engagement of marriage, by mutual consent of both parties concerned," answered Dixon, tramping sturdily forward like an old campaigner.

"I don't think I ever heard of the people before, though I imagine they figure largely in society items. There was something novel about this thing that caused it to stick in my mind.

"The woman is a Miss Gordon, I think, and the man's name is the same as your own. It

seems that the man is such a keen sportsman, and the girl such a keen society person that they can't manage to hit it off. He is always knocking about in the woods.

"So it seems that they have agreed to disagree now instead of later. Very wise of them, too, I think. I don't take much stock in such items of news, usually; but it all popped back into my mind when you told me your name. Mr. David Westley, of something or other Fifth Avenue, and something Park, somewhere in the country, is the name of the wise and inconsiderate young man."

"So the thing was mutual, you say?" queried Westley.

"So the paper said. It sounded to me as if the statement had been made by her people," responded the doctor.

"Nothing about another man, I suppose," queried Westley.

"Not a word; but I suppose there is another man at the back of it or another woman. There usually is," replied Dixon.

"I imagine there is," said Westley.

They pressed forward at a swinging pace. The snow ceased to fall before morning, but the wide and beaten track was sticky with it.

But this did not seem to bother the doctor, who must have had legs of wood and lungs of leather.

Camp was made just before dawn, and they drank tea and slept for three hours. They breakfasted shortly after sunrise, lit their pipes and sped onward.

Now the doctor could see the trail which they followed, and it filled him with astonishment. He asked questions about it, and Westley told him of the march of the sixty men on snow-shoes and of the seventy-mile haul of a saw-mill on sleds, by hand.

The doctor was delighted. He had never heard of anything to equal it. He regarded Westley with admiration and wonder.

Westley, the doctor, and Gabe Bear made a new record for that trip. Dixon and Westley went straight to the latter's shack upon reaching the big clearing at Two Moose.

It was late at night, and bitterly cold, with white stars shining high like points of ice. But the interior of the cabin was warm enough, with a good fire burning in the little stove.

A shaded lamp, with the wick turned low, stood on a corner of the table. Mr. Duff sat in a chair with his shoulder to the lamp, sound asleep. A woman, Rosie MacKim, knelt beside the bunk on the farther side of the room.

She did not lift her head at the opening of the door. Sleep had claimed her, even the mother, after those nights and days of watching.

In the narrow bunk lay Pierre, alive, awake, turning his head from side to side on the pillow and talking continuously in a babbling, feeble voice.

The doctor and David paused on the threshold for a second or two, inspecting the room with quick and anxious eyes. The doctor was in front. He nodded his head and stepped forward. David followed him and closed the door.

The doctor slipped his pack from his shoulders and lowered it noiselessly to the floor. Swiftly and silently he removed his outer coat, his gloves and fur cap. He glanced at the bottles that stood on a stool beside the bunk, picking up two of them and sniffing them.

"Right enough, as far as they go," he murmured; "but I think, by the look of things, that we must resort to more heroic measures."

He bent over the restless, wide-eyed, babbling man in the bed, laid a cool hand on the hot brow and over the bearded, thin face, and then dropped his fingers to one of the fragile wrists.

"Not much need of a thermometer here," he said.

David looked down at Pierre over the doctor's shoulder.

"Any chance for him?" he asked, quietly.

"Chances enough," replied Dixon. "He is as full of life as he is of fever. All we have

to do is beat the fever. But we must have the room to ourselves for a while."

Westley awoke Duff and Rosie MacKim.

"The mill is set up," said Duff. "Days at the mill an' nights at nursing—and I'm all in. I kept right on soaking quinine to him. I couldn't think of anything else. Well, I'm glad you got a doctor. I'll just go home now, if you don't need me, and try the feel of a bed."

The woman was not so easily sent away; but after a long look at Dr. Dixon's clever and kindly young face, and a few words of encouragement from David, she drew her shawl over her head and went from the cabin.

During the trip in, Westley had described the case—all that he knew of the earlier stages of it—to the doctor. Now the wound was examined and found to be in a healthy state of healing. It was redressed and bound, with a bandage of rubber fastened over all.

"The fever is not from the wound," said the doctor. "Now for all the blankets you can get and four or five buckets of ice-water."

Westley piled all his blankets that were not in the bunk on the floor, then snatched up a zinc bucket, opened the door and stepped outside, closing the door behind him. A figure crouched beside the door. It was Rosie MacKim.

"The doctor needs water," he said, "water

from the ice-hole. Get a couple of buckets, and somebody to help you, and come along."

The woman obeyed him without a word. Westley went down to the hole in the river and filled his bucket, first breaking the strong skin of ice that had formed since the folk of the post had drawn out their water for their supper tea-kettles.

On his way back he passed two figures in the path. One was the mother, the other Marie Benoit. The girl had her hood about her face and replied to his brief words of salutation in a tremulous whisper.

He passed on and entered the cabin, where he found Dixon stripped to his shirt, with his collar discarded and his sleeves rolled up to his shoulders. Westley stood his bucket on the floor and went out again.

He met the women, took the brimming pails from them and told them to find and fill four more pails and leave them outside the door of his shack. Then he returned to the sick room and told the doctor what he had done.

"We can begin now," said the doctor. "Lend me a hand here."

They lifted Pierre from the bunk to a bed of folded blankets on the floor. The poor fellow still babbled and turned his head continually from side to side.

"Hullo, Westley," he said, staring at the doctor with wide, bright eyes.

"I guess we make the post afore sundown, yes. Then you see my girl, Marie Benoit—fines' girl in this country—fines' girl in the whole world, maybe. Bad goin,' what? Too much snow—too much woods—too much trail.

"An' hot, Westley—hottern' hades. I guess we keep right along. Steve Canadian, he run away with that girl of yours, Westley—that girl you don't tell me about. We catch him, you bet—an' kill him, maybe."

The doctor looked into Westley's set, anxious face.

"The poor chap is in a bad way," he said. "Burning up; but we'll cool him. Stand that bucket a little nearer, will you; and pass me that towel. It will do for a sponge."

And so the fight began. Westley looked on for a minute, then got more towels and rolled up his own sleeves. The sweat stood out in glistening drops on the doctor's forehead.

"The river," muttered Pierre. "We come to the river—an' the ice all out. We got to swim it, Westley. I see Steve Canadian on the other side. He got his gun."

Half an hour later they rolled him in dry blankets and lifted him back to the bunk. The doctor took his temperature, and nodded.

"We may as well leave this mess as it is," he said, pointing to the wet floor and the soaking blankets, "for we'll have to bathe him again in about an hour. Now if you have any whisky handy we'd both be better for a nip."

Westley went to the place wherein he kept his store of whisky and the liquor which he had taken from the factor. It was empty. There was not a drop in the shack. He wondered if Dominick Benoit had taken it—or if the factor had fallen again?

"One minute," he said, pulling on his coat. "I have to go over to the store and get a bottle. I've been cleaned out."

He found the two women near the door, told them that Pierre was resting quietly, and ordered them home. Rosie MacKim snatched up his hand and pressed her lips to it. Then the two women went away quietly, vanishing in the starlight.

Westley hesitated for a moment, then went straight toward the factor's house. Light shone from the windows of the big sitting-room. Westley went up to the front door and hammered upon it. It was soon opened by the factor himself. A glance told David that Grant was sober. Grant put out his hand heartily and drew him across the threshold.

"I heard you were back, and had brought a doctor," he said. "I am glad to see you again,

Westley. Come in, old man, come in and talk. Have you heard the news? My first book is published—yes, as quick as that. A copy came in with you to-night, in Gabe Bear's mail-bag."

His eyes were shining with excitement.

"I am glad of that," said Westley, heartily; and he was about to close the door and state his errand when a voice from the uncertain, starlit gloom at his back caused him to turn swiftly.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said the voice.

Westley and the factor saw a muffled figure standing at the foot of the steps.

"I am Corporal Wyre, of the mounted police," said the stranger. "I am looking for an Indian who is wanted a long way from here. I think he is somewhere in this country."

Westley glanced at Donald Grant. The factor's face had changed to a mask and his eyes had fallen as dull as painted wood.

"Come in, corporal," he said.

"Known in the East by the name of Micmac Jim," said the corporal, ascending the steps. A light of relief flickered in Grant's eyes.

"Never heard of him," he said.

"And sometimes known as Steve Canadian," said the corporal.

Grant stepped back from the door with doubt and despair stamped on his face.

CHAPTER XV

THE CALL OF THE CORPORAL

Westley felt a sudden, keen pity for the factor. Grant was in an awkward position; but it would be madness for him to deny to the corporal a knowledge of Steve Canadian.

And after all, who would pay any attention to the Indian's story of the factor's past? Who in this country would be even interested in it? Grant's secret was no offence against the law and was in no way connected with the case of Steve Canadian.

What object would Steve have in telling it, if he were taken by the police through no fault of the factor's? And what object would the police have, even if they heard it, in giving it to the world at large?

Westley reviewed all this in his mind in a moment and felt that Grant's fear of the bad Indian was unreasonable and had always been unreasonable. There is where the cowardly nature still lurks, he reflected, gazing at his unfortunate friend. Grant returned the glance, and his forehead flushed.

"Yes, Steve Canadian is somewhere in this country," he said. "He does not live at the post, but comes in once or twice a week. He has a camp somewhere about here, I think. What is he wanted for?"

"Attempted murder, sir, on more than one count," replied Corporal Wyre, removing his fur cap, his kit-bag and his snowshoes.

"I haven't seen him to-day," said the factor. "When did you arrive, corporal?"

"To-night, sir," said Wyre, unslinging a belt and two revolvers from beneath his short fur coat. "Came in from the West. Left my command—a half-breed and a tent, in camp about one hundred miles from here. The breed had a touch of snow-blindness, so I left him to take a few days' rest."

By this time the three men were in the lamp-lit sitting-room. The corporal's gray eyes went glinting around the room and over the faces and persons of the factor and David Westley.

"Westley," said the factor, with a splendid show of composure, "the hour and the occasion call for something of which I have not so much as a drop in the house."

"And that's the very thing I came here to borrow," replied David.

"The doctor asked for a drink after his work with Pierre, and my canteen has been cleared

out during my absence. He must be tired of waiting for it. I'll try Dominic Benoit for a bottle."

The corporal glanced sharply from one to the other.

"If you're talking about whisky, I'll admit that a nip wouldn't go bad, just now," he said.

"I'll get some from Benoit," said Westley. "I'll be back in a minute."

Corporal Wyre took up his fur cap. "I'll step along with you, if you don't object," he said.

Westley and the arm of the law went out. Westley led the way straight to Benoit's cabin. As he neared the door he turned to Wyre.

"I suppose this is part of your duty," he said; "and I am afraid you think the factor and I were romancing when we said there was no liquor in the house."

"It is my duty to be suspicious, sir," replied the corporal.

Westley hammered on the door until old Dominic opened it.

"Dominic," he said, "I want two bottles of my own whisky—and be quick about it, you miserable old thief. A fine nurse you are, to carry off my whisky when you were supposed to be looking after poor Pierre. No, don't start to lie about it. This gentleman is Corporal Wyre, of the Royal Canadian Northwest

Mounted Police. Two bottles, I said—and be sharp about it. We are in a hurry."

Dominic turned as one in an evil dream; and the next minute, without a word, handed out two bottles through the half-open door.

"Now if you will come over to my shack for a moment, I'll be obliged to you," said Westley to the corporal. "I have a sick man there, and a doctor—and the doctor is waiting for me."

Wyre followed him in silence. They entered the sick room noiselessly. The doctor got up from a chair by the stove to meet them. He looked inquiringly at the corporal.

"Have you been all the way back to St. Anne's?" he asked of David.

David explained the delay and handed over a bottle. The corporal removed his cap respectfully, and firmly and respectfully stepped over and looked at the man in the bed.

"Who is this?" he asked, "and what is the matter with him?"

The doctor explained Pierre's case, speaking of the fever, but making no mention of the wound. Doctors are naturally discreet. He produced a corkscrew and opened the bottle.

"Corporal Wyre and I have to take this over to Grant," said Westley. "Take your drink, doctor. I'll be back in time to lend a hand at Pierre's next bath."

Outside, the corporal turned to Westley.

"I can't place you, Mr. Westley," he said. "You don't seem to belong to this kind of thing—and yet in some ways you do.

"And the doctor?—a city man, as sure as my name is Wyre. And the sick 'breed in your own bed? And the factor with a half-written novel on his table and not a drop of Scotch in his house. It is certainly the queerest H. B. C. post I've ever run across."

"You are a keen observer," replied Westley. "I am fairly new to Smoky River; but I belong here, and a good bit of the country belongs to me. The doctor arrived here to-night. I brought him in to the half-breed, who is a friend of mine. Mr. Grant has no Scotch in the house for the simple reason that he is supposed to be on the water-wagon. He had plenty of it when I first came here; but it was too much for him. But how do you know anything about the half-written novels?"

"I read half a page of it—and liked it fine," replied Wyre. He stepped close to Westley. "What sort of name has Steve Canadian around here?" he asked.

"Why, a very bad name indeed," answered Westley, frankly.

"A bad man hanging around a post always means a slack factor," said the corporal, reflectively. "I suppose Mr. Grant is so busy with

his novels that he lets things slide? Why doesn't he chuck all this and go back out to civilization?"

"You had better ask him," said Westley.

"Oh, it's none of my business," returned Wyre.

They found the factor sitting at his table with an idle pen between his fingers. He came forward as they entered and welcomed them graciously. He left the room for a moment and returned with glasses and a jug of water. He pulled the cork from the bottle and poured the liquor for the other two. He poured none for himself. His eyes met David's.

"You two must excuse me," he said, with a faint smile. "I am on a keg."

He passed around a box of cigars and lit a weed himself. The corporal sipped his Scotch and water, yawned once or twice and puffed slowly at his cigar.

He seemed to have little to say, and did not refer again to the man he had come in after. Beyond remarking upon the comfort of the room and of a sheltered life in general he was silent. Westley left in a little while and went back to his own shack.

There he and the doctor gave Pierre another wash-down with ice-water. This time it brought Pierre to his senses for a moment and he looked straight at Westley and called him by name.

Again they rolled him in dry blankets and lifted him back to the bunk. The doctor fed him a little with condensed milk, greatly diluted.

"We are cooling him," he said. "I don't think we had better give him another before morning. I'll watch him till then. Where are you going to sleep, Mr. Westley?"

"If you don't need me, I'll find a bed at the factor's," said David.

The doctor assured him that he could get through the night alone; so Westley returned to the big house and explained matters to Grant.

It was then very late. Grant made up beds by the stove in the big room for David and the corporal, and then retired to his own chamber. The two in the living-room rolled up in their blankets and went instantly to sleep; but not so the factor.

Grant sat on the edge of his bed for half an hour, staring at the lamp which he had placed on a chair. At last he took off his slippers and, reaching under the bed, pulled forth a pair of moccasins and several pairs of woolen stockings. These he put on. His slim hands trembled.

He moved noiselessly to a closet in the room and took out a blanket-coat and a cap. He extinguished the lamp and stole from the room. He descended the stairs in the dark, without a sound, paused for a moment at the door of the room in which his guests were

sleeping, then turned and felt his furtive way along the narrow hall, through a pantry and storeroom and into the deserted kitchen.

There he found snowshoes, a lantern and a short-handled belt-ax. He pulled back the bolts of the door cautiously and stepped outside. He went swiftly across the big clearing, following beaten paths from cabin to cabin.

At the edge of the woods he put on his snowshoes. He made his way into the black forest through the thickest tangles of underbrush. At last he lit the lantern and looked at his pocket-compass.

He changed his course and presently came to the deep-drifted, brush-tangled bed of a stream. He broke his way through the brush and followed this for about half a mile. He left the stream and presently came to what he was looking for—the outer trails of a moose-yard.

These trails had been scarred by fresh hoof-prints even since the new snow had ceased to fall. He removed the long racquets from his feet and followed one of these twisting tracks. He extinguished the lantern and went as cautiously as if hunting. He skirted the center of the moose-yard, swung around it and beyond it and again halted and lit the lantern.

The forest, thick with underbrush, arose steeply before him up the flanks of a high and broken hill. He whistled shrilly, waited and

whistled again, now holding the lantern close down to the snow and now high above his head.

Suddenly a long figure stepped noiselessly into the circle of light, out of the black wall of trees and dark. It was Steve Canadian, alias Micmac Jim, rifle in hand.

"Hullo," said the Indian, with suspicion and derision clashing harshly in his voice, "what t'ell bring you here?"

The factor flushed darkly at the insolence of tone and words.

"There is a corporal of the police at the post," he replied. "He came in to-night, and is looking for you. He spoke of you as Micmac Jim at first, and I said I had never heard of you. Then he called you by the name you go by here."

"An' you say you know me!" exclaimed Steve, threateningly.

"What else could I do," returned the factor. "Westley was there—and he would have found out from any one at the post, anyway, that you are in this part of the country. So I told him that you often came in to the post. He is asleep at my house now; and I have come to warn you."

The Indian glanced furtively about him with his evil eyes red in the lantern-light. He swore, and it sounded like the snarl of a dog.

"You try to scare me away!" he cried. "You

send for the police, I guess, to scare me away —an' save yer money. Oh, yes. I guess I shoot you. No, I don't shoot you. Gimme some money an' I go away. Yes, gimme two —three hundred dollars an' I go."

He leered at the factor.

"I have no money with me," said Grant, unsteadily. "I did not think of it. But you have plenty of money. It isn't more than a month ago that I gave you two hundred dollars; and when you say that I sent for the police you are lying—and you know it."

Steve Canadian sneered. "Yes, I know," he said. "I know you don't like police no more nor me. Gimme some money an' I go."

"I tell you that I have no money with me," said Grant, desperately.

"Oh, darn you, then I shoot you," retorted the Indian. "You suppose to be dead man, anyhow."

"Don't be a fool!" cried Grant. "If you shoot me you'll hang for it. The company will catch you and hang you if they have to track you 'round the world. Man, I have given you plenty of money—and I have always treated you right.

"Westley would have you in jail now for what you did to Pierre MacKim, but for me. Go away; and later you'll be able to come back and I'll give you some more money."

The Indian snarled. "Grant," he said, "you got heart like a fly. If you have man's heart you kill me long ago. You scared to lift yer finger at me. Oh, I guess I kill you now—jus' for fun."

Grant's courage melted before the Indian's mad eyes. Yes, the fellow was mad, or drunk, and thoroughly evil. Grant set the lighted lantern down in the snow, moving like a man in a nightmare, and stepped backward.

He screamed; but he scarcely heard his own voice. The Indian laughed and raised his rifle. The factor stumbled, and in recovering his balance struck his hand sharply against the head of his ax. The big, fur mitten fell from his right hand.

"Stan' up, Grant, an' get shot like a man," sneered Steve Canadian.

Drunk with terror, Grant floundered to his feet. The ax was in his hands, and he stood beyond the light of the lantern. Quicker than thought—for his mind was too stricken with fear to work at all—he threw the ax straight at the Indian with every ounce of his weight behind it.

Steve Canadian went down upon the snow with a gurgling grunt. Grant darted forward, snatched up the lantern turned and fled.

Steve Canadian went down upon the snow with a gurgling grunt.
(Page 226.)

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CHAPTER XVI

A STRANGER VISITS TWO MOOSE

The factor showed a haggard face to his guests at the breakfast-table on the morning after his expedition into the woods to warn Steve Canadian of the arrival of the corporal of police.

David Westley went over to his own shack to see the sick man and the doctor. He found both sleeping quietly. To his unprofessional eye it looked as if the crisis for Pierre had passed.

Corporal Wyre lit his pipe and sat by the stove, talking a little, asking a few questions about Steve Canadian, and glancing through some old magazines, as if he had come into the wilderness for no more serious purpose. The factor, heavy-eyed, with his heart disturbed by conflicting emotions of relief, fear and remorse, entertained the corporal to the best of his ability.

After the midday dinner, which the factor and the corporal ate together, Wyre remarked that he might as well step out and look around

for Canadian, considering the fact that Canadian had failed to call upon him. Donald Grant made no objection to this, but put a couple of men at the policeman's disposal.

So Wyre got into his moccasins and outer clothes and left the house. Grant wondered dully, for a little, if Wyre would, by any chance, find the body of the Indian; and what was likely to happen if he did. He felt sleepy.

He put these unpleasant questions out of his mind, began to plan wonderful dreams of the future, and so fell asleep at last in his chair.

The corporal returned to the big house shortly after lamplight time. The factor was awake, smoking a cigar and writing busily on one of his stories.

"Couldn't find him, sir," said Wyre; "but I was pretty warm. I found his den, and what I take to be some of his blood—and this."

He showed the belt-ax which Grant had hurled full into the bad Indian's face. Blood and snow were frozen to the pole, or back, of the wedgelike head. Grant stared at it.

"You found that?" he queried faintly. "You found that, but not the man himself?"

"That's it," replied Wyre. "And there was plenty of blood on the snow, and the mark of the place where he had fallen, and his trail where he had crawled up through the brush to his den. But I couldn't find him. Wonder

who hit him? Do you happen to know the ax, sir?"

Grant put out his hands and took hold of the ax with a mighty effort of will.

"Why, confound it all! I could swear to it as my ax," he said.

It was well done. Wyre looked perplexed.

"Your ax?" he said. "Where did you keep it?"

"Hanging in one of the sheds."

Wyre nodded. "I saw some recent snowshoe tracks," he remarked. "They were hard enough to follow, I can tell you. Fooled me a couple of times in the underbrush and gave me the slip in a moose-yard."

Grant felt no uneasiness. He had burned the snowshoes before retiring to his bed upon returning from the expedition.

"All the snowshoes around here are made much the same shape," he said. He wondered how the corporal had happened not to find Steve Canadian. Surely the fellow could not have gone far after that injury.

Corporal Wyre searched the wilderness immediately around the post for three more days, and then went away, unsuccessful. By this time Dr. Dixon felt pretty sure that Pierre's recovery was simply a matter of time and proper attention.

"We need you right here, winter and sum-

mer," David Westley said to the doctor, and he made an offer which the doctor had sense enough not to refuse.

Dixon had plenty to do. There were a few cases of illness, and more of accidents, in the lumbering crews. The work of the post and Westley's great adventure went on. Lumber was hauled to the new mill and sawn. More lumber—thousands of logs of pine and spruce —were hauled to points on the banks of the frozen river and there piled in "brows," ready to tumble into the river as soon as spring broke the ice and sent all grinding away downstream.

And while they worked at the lumbering and sawing, Westley and Duff elaborated their plans for the future development of the wilderness. The factor, too, made plans for the future. He made another midnight expedition to the scene of his dispute with Steve Canadian.

The corporal was right—the Indian had got clear away. And he had managed to take his rifle along with him. The den on the mountainside, hidden by a tangle of brush and a screen of overhanging branches, was undoubtedly deserted.

Grant felt something of relief at this assurance that he had not killed Steve Canadian; but this emotion was soon replaced by another. Anxiety came back to him, and a feverish desire to get away from Two Moose and hide

from Steve Canadian in the cities of the world. The fellow might turn up again any day. The only thing that kept the factor at his post now was his need of money. His first book was published, 'tis true, but no advance had been made to him, and it would be months before he would get any from the publisher, no matter how well the book might be selling.

He took it for granted that the book would enjoy a moderate success, and laid his plans accordingly. The very day that should bring him his money should see him started upon his journey back to the world, by way of St. Anne's.

Pierre MacKim, though out of danger, continued limp as a rag for months. In March he went back to his mother's cabin. Rosie nursed him, and Marie Benoit visited him once a day. Pierre was happy. He was alive; and it was David Westley who had saved his life to him. And Marie was very kind and more beautiful than ever.

Sometimes she worried him a little with the far-away look in her dark eyes and her air of preoccupation. He talked to her of David. Never, he said, had so great and good a man set foot in the Smoky River country.

Had he not found the little one when she was lost far away on the other side of the river? Had he not frightened Steve Canadian clean out of the country? And, now, did not he

himself, Pierre MacKim, owe the very beatings of this heart to him? It was true; and Marie would listen to such talk by the hour, in silence, with that far-away blankness in her fine eyes, and Heaven only knows what thoughts and emotions in her wild heart.

As for David, he kept away from Marie, seeing her and speaking to her only when he could not help it. He flattered himself that he managed this so neatly that even the girl could not notice the restraint in his manner. This was not accomplished without an effort, for Marie continued to attract him.

She seemed to him a natural and suitable part of this life and the wilderness. He saw that her womanhood and her beauty were not to be measured by the standards of civilization. But he thought of Pierre MacKim.

And so the weeks went by, and a month or two rolled up on their heels. It was in March that Gabe Bear, bringing in the mails from St. Anne's, guided a stranger to within five miles of the post and there left him to splice the frame of one of his snowshoes. Gabe was sorry that he could not stop and do the splicing for the stranger; but his duty as a trusted official of the King of England bade him press forward without delay. Gabe had a great notion of himself and his job.

"Don't worry about me," said the stranger. "I'll follow along in your tracks."

Gabe Bear went straight to the factor's house, as required by law, and placed the mail-bag on the table in the big sitting-room.

"A stranger come along with me," said Gabe. "He tell me to say nothin'. He give me five dollar to keep quiet. He five mile back now —not so much now, maybe—mendin' his racket. Guess I better tell you."

"A stranger?" queried the factor, looking up sharply.

"Sure," replied Gabe. "One English sport, I guess. He ax a little 'bout you an' some 'bout Westley—but not so much as he want for to know, maybe. English feller, you bet. I see one like him long time back. Soldier-officer, I t'ink. Pretty good feller."

"What's his name?" asked Grant, anxiously.

"He don't tell me," replied Gabe. "I ax him, too."

Grant sorted the half-dozen letters and three newspapers. One letter was for himself from his publishers. The others were business communications for Westley. He signed and dated Gabe's paper, then gave him the five letters and told him to take them over to Mr. Westley.

The moment Gabe left the room, Grant looked to see what his publishers had to say. It ap-

peared that, during the absence of both partners from the office, a clerk had replied to a letter that the firm had been holding, awaiting instructions. In short, the aforementioned clerk had sent Mr. Donald Grant's address, without authority, to an admiring reader. The name of the admiring reader was Walter Joice.

The firm was sorry, but trusted that no harm had been done. As for the book, it was selling well. They should be glad to consider another at the earliest date convenient to Mr. Grant. And so on.

Grant slipped the letter into his pocket. He turned in his chair and looked out of the window into the bright clearing. He stood up, placed a cigar-box on top of the manuscript on which he had been working at the moment of Gabe's arrival, sighed, and left the room.

He came back ten minutes later, dressed for the open. With feverish haste he gathered together all his manuscripts, papers, and letters, threw them into an empty drawer of his desk, and locked the drawer.

The stranger mended his broken snowshoe after a fashion, smoked a pipe in comfort, and then followed the broad, white trail into the post. He seemed to be in no hurry; but his brow was heavy with thought. He entered the big clearing at last, and came face to face with David Westley.

Westley showed astonishment and displeasure, but the stranger gave no sign of either of these emotions. He pulled off one of his mink-skin gloves and extended his hand.

"Hello, Westley!" he said. "How're you feeling?"

His eyes were entirely frank, his smile entirely friendly. There was no jeer, or no double meaning, in his polite query. David rose to the occasion, schooled his features, and grasped the other's hand.

"Hello, Joice!" he said. "Glad to see you. What lucky wind has blown you into the Smoky River country?"

"Give me a chance to sit up against something to eat and a pot of tea, and I'll tell you," said Joice.

"I have a shack here," replied David. "Come along." He glanced sharply at Joice. "Did my man tell you where to find me?" he asked.

"Bless me, no!" returned the Englishman. "But I've not been looking for you, Westley. That's the queer part of it. I had no idea of your whereabouts until I struck St. Anne's. This is a great pleasure, Westley, but absolutely unexpected."

Westley could not doubt this statement; and that made it seem all the more queer. What had brought Joice straight into Two Moose? He felt relief at the thought that it was not

himself—and with the relief a childish, unreasonable sense of ill-treatment.

Joice had just happened to stumble in on him, and was mildly pleased to meet him again. The Englishman evidently felt no awkwardness in the situation. Heavens! could it be that he and all his affairs were already forgotten? It was an humiliating thought; and yet surely it was the thing he wanted—forgetfulness.

Joice told his story over a hastily cooked meal and a pot of tea. It was disjointed; but Westley was able to put most of the joints together. Joice had read a new book by one Donald Grant.

The story was identical, so far as his memory served, with one that a friend of his—a relative, in fact—had invented and told to him when they were boys at school. His relative's name was not Grant. He had asked the publishers of the book for Mr. Grant's address, and after a wait of several months, had received word that Donald Grant was resident in Fort Two Moose, Smoky River, etc., etc.

"What do you want of Grant?" asked Westley. "He is factor here."

"I want to learn where he picked up that story, and by what right he uses it," replied Joice.

Westley lit his pipe. He saw roughly how the land lay. His first and strongest feeling was of pity for Grant. Well, it was none of

his business; but so far as he could, he would make it his business to protect the factor from the thing he feared—disclosure.

"Perhaps your friend gave the story to Grant," he suggested.

"My friend is dead," replied Joice. "He died in South Africa."

Westley placed a box of cigarettes at Joice's elbow.

"I'll step over to the house and see if Grant is at home," he said.

"I'll go with you," said Joice.

Westley could think of no reasonable objection to this; but his intention had been to give Grant the tip that some one who had known him in the old life was looking for him under the impression that he had come dishonestly, in the person of Donald Grant, by the book which had been published.

They did not find Grant in his sitting-room. They failed to discover him anywhere in the house. The servants knew nothing more than that the factor's outer coat, moccasins, and snowshoes were gone.

"He's sure to be back before long," said Westley. "He never stays out long. Suppose we sit down and wait for him."

They sat down and waited. They waited until sunset, dusk, dark, and dinner-time, and still the factor failed to come home. Dinner

was served, for the cook had received no orders to the contrary, and Joice and Westley remained and ate it. They went back to David's shack after that, but called again several times during the evening. Grant did not return, however.

"I don't understand it," said Westley, who was puzzled and anxious; "I never knew him to go away like this before."

Joice was equally at a loss to know why the factor had fled from his house. Gabe, of course, may have warned the factor that a stranger was on his way in to see him; but the man's conscience must be very bad to send him into the woods like this.

Joice asked Westley what manner of person this Donald Grant was; and Westley was discreet, weighing every answer and making the best of the absent factor. He saw Joice's mistake. He saw that Grant also had the advantage of Joice.

It was quite evident that the captain suspected nothing of the game which Grant, in his old name, had played upon his friends and the world at large. Joice had come to the wilderness to find a man whom he suspected of cribbing another man's story, little knowing that if he should find him it would be in the person of an old friend whom he believed to be dead and buried.

The factor did not show up in the morning, and so a search party was formed. Joice, who was a good woodsman, joined the party, which consisted of six men. Westley took a line of his own; and his luck was with him. He struck the moose-yard and skirted it. He came at last to the tangled hillside and fresh snowshoe tracks. Half-way up the tangled slope he was confronted by the man he sought.

"Thank Heaven it's you!" exclaimed Grant.

"What's your game?" asked Westley, heated a little by his climb.

"I don't want to meet that fellow," said Grant. "I used to know him. He's a connection of mine. He thinks I am dead. What the deuce brought him in here after me?"

"He has no idea it is you he is after," replied Westley. "He has read your book, and wants to know where you got hold of that story. He says he heard it told, years ago, at school by a friend of his."

"He honors his friend's memory," said Grant bitterly; "but if he knew I was alive he would whistle another tune. Westley, if you are my friend, get rid of him. Get him out of this country."

CHAPTER XVII

JOICE AND DOROTHY

Westley called a halt on the search party. His word was law at Two Moose with everybody but Captain Joice. He talked to Joice, and at last half convinced him that it was not just the thing to hunt a man out of his house on the doubtful charge of cribbing a story that a schoolboy had told years before.

It was no charge at all. The story had not even been written, let alone copyrighted. And he assured Joice that the factor had imagined every word of the story himself. He would swear to it.

He painted Donald Grant in a light that touched a cord of pity in the captain's heart. So after three days Joice went away; sorely puzzled and itching with curiosity. He would have remained longer, and probed the mystery of Donald Grant to the bottom, but for the fact that he felt in taking his departure he was obliging David Westley. By obliging David he threw a sop to his own conscience.

But why should Walter Joice's conscience trouble him? Nothing but the fact that in-

stead of playing the game he was letting the game play itself. Not once had he mentioned the name of Dorothy Gordon to David. He had avoided it as carefully as David had done. And yet he knew that it was his duty to talk of her to Westley, and tell him the truth.

He knew the truth, though he did his best to blind his eyes to it. Hope was not dead in him; but something of his old sense of fair play had died a lingering death.

So he went out to civilization, by way of St. Anne's, without any accomplishment to his credit. This was not like Walter Joice; but the best of sportsmen do not always play up to their top form.

The factor came out of his hiding-place, thanked Westley for his good service, and went on with the writing of the story from which Joice's arrival had driven him. No questions were asked. Duff was far too busy to ask questions, and the lumbermen in the camps knew nothing about the affairs of the post.

Out in the world to which Joice had returned, against which David Westley continued to harden his heart, and toward which the heart of the factor yearned day and night, death and life and joy and despair went on at their old game; and men and women (pawns in the game) continued in the enjoyment of the old belief that they were the players.

The Gordons went south, after Tom had shot a bear and failed to hit several other furtive children of the northern wilderness. They did not stop in New York, but by easy stages went south to Florida, to Bermuda, and at last to the little island of Barbados.

Captain Joice, returning to New York, learned of the Gordons' continued trip southward. He followed them, torn by anxiety, uncertainty, and self-scorn.

Exactly why he followed he could not say. At one moment it seemed to him that he had a hundred reasons, and in the next moment he was equally sure that he had no reason at all —except the mad thing in his heart that was imperceptibly changing from a desire to a matter of sheer determination.

His love, perhaps, had cooled a little with so little to feed upon; but the very odds against him had brought to life something of stubborn pride that held him to the game. The fact that he had allowed himself to make one play that was open to criticism made him the more susceptible to the promptings of this thing of stubborn pride.

So he followed Dorothy from Florida to Bermuda, from Bermuda still southward to Barbados—and it was in Barbados that he came up with her. You may well believe that the sentimental mission that had taken him into the

Smoky River country was very faint in his mind by this time.

Captain Joice arrived in Bridgetown at about the hour of sunset, when sea and sky were all aflame with red and the thin cocoanut-trees stood black against the white walls of the town.

From the harbor-front he took an open carriage to the chief hotel of the place, which lies about a mile beyond the town. Night had fallen by the time the hotel was reached. Great white stars shone overhead in a purple sky; the open windows, doors, and wide porches of the hotel illumined the inner edges of rose-gardens and lawns; the low drumming of the surf along the reefs came in and the trade clashed the banners of the high palms with an equable and never-failing breath.

This, surely, was the garden and the hour of romance. Joice signed his name in the register at the ornate desk, glanced back over a few pages, then followed a servant up-stairs with a shaking heart.

Joice changed for dinner in an agitation of haste, and then at the last moment he decided not to go down to the dining-room. He had a curtailed meal brought up to him. He loitered over his coffee, now fearful that time was slipping away too fast, and again cursing its crawling feet.

The coffee did not steady his nerves. Sweat

jumped out upon his forehead that had nothing to do with the tropic climate.

"This must stop," he said. "This must end, one way or another. I've lost my grip on myself."

He found the Gordons on the wide gallery overlooking the interior court of the hotel. He spoke to John Angus first. The old man exclaimed his name and looked at once astonished, hopeful, and confused.

He turned to Dorothy. The girl arose and faced him, standing slim and white between the long arms of the Berbice chair. Her back was to the court of rustling foliage and the white stars, and the light from the wide windows fell upon her face.

She extended her hand in silence with a gesture that went to the Englishman's heart. He was startled by the pallor of her face and the wide yet shadowed regard of her eyes that seemed to take no light, and reflect no light, from the bright windows. And he saw, with dull consternation at his heart, that her face was thinner than he had ever known it.

He took her hand awkwardly. Then Tom, with a cigar in his mouth and a commonplace greeting that was cordial and undismayed, stepped up and saved the situation. Joice took a chair between Mr. Gordon and Dorothy. He accepted a cigarette from the old man's case

with fumbling fingers. He looked helplessly up at the white stars, and then straight ahead at the billows of tropical foliage that swelled up into the light from the hidden court below. But he saw nothing but the girl's pale face and shadowed, dauntless eyes.

Deep in his heart he cursed David Westley. Never before had he felt so absolutely antagonistic to Westley; and never before had he tasted the bitterness of defeat like this. And yet his stubborn intention stood for little, sullen and desperate against the onslaughts of reason and the voice of his true self.

Young Tom Gordon did his best to make talk. John Angus made a show of playing up to him. Captain Joice aroused himself now and again to make some futile remark or answer some aimless question. And the girl, though silent, held the attentions of the company, sharing them only with David Westley.

Joice saw this. The man in the wilderness, thousands of miles away, possessed the thoughts of the company. And yet these others were unaware even of the man's whereabouts. The thought chilled the Englishman as if he had sensed a ghost at his shoulder.

Joice felt a touch on his sleeve. Glancing down he saw the pale gleam of the girl's hand. He leaned a little toward her over the arm of his low chair. Their backs were to the light

of the windows; and her face, turned to him, was no more than a pale mask set in shadows.

"Have you nothing to tell me?" she breathed.

"What can I tell you—that you would care to hear?" he replied.

Her hand slipped away from his sleeve. Motionless, he stared at leaves of trees that topped the railing in front of him. Emotions, keen as physical pain, quick as light, conflicting as death and life—Heaven knows I am not qualified to analyze them!

He gazed at the trees with steady eyes and a still face. His hand on the arm of his chair lay as motionless as a thing of wood; and in his heart the battles swelled up, ebbed and swelled again. And at last of passions and despairs only the ashes remained, and of the many pities that had torn him only a great pity for Dorothy.

All that was stubborn and sullen in him had burned out, and the heart that was left was the true heart of Walter Joice. He felt only shame of himself now and the great pity for the young woman beside him.

He turned a little toward her, sighed, and put out his hand. It touched hers, rested there a moment, and was withdrawn.

"I have something to tell you," he said scarcely above a whisper. "I did not mean to tell it—so soon, at least."

She sat forward in her low chair.

"You promised—long ago—in Central Park —to find him for me," she said.

Mr. Gordon got out of his chair and went indoors. Tom threw a lighted cigarette down among the crowded green of the trees in the court and followed his father.

"It was quite by accident that I ran across him," said Joice slowly.

No wonder he spoke slowly, for he knew that every word brought him nearer to the inexorable conclusion of a beautiful thing that he had dreamed. But many a fine dream must be undreamed in this world, Heaven knows; and, after all, the stuff of which such dreams are spun is being forever renewed in the hearts of men and women; and the best years of life, and all the cities and wonders of the world, and a man's work to be done, still waited for him. Joice saw these truths and acknowledged them to himself with a wan smile.

"I was up in the north on some business of my own," he continued, "and heard of Westley. He was located in the very spot for which I was bound. I saw him, and talked to him. We were together for three days. He is well, and he seems happy."

"Happy?" queried Dorothy, with a catch in her voice, leaning yet farther forward in a vain attempt to see his face more clearly.

"Content," replied Joice. "He has large interests in the country. He keeps himself busy; and he is a big man in that wilderness."

Dorothy trembled. Her hands twitched in her lap. She leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes.

"Do you feel—faint?" he asked anxiously. "Is there anything I can bring you—brandy or something?"

She shook her head. After a moment or two she sat up and opened her eyes.

"What did he say of me?" she asked. "And what did you tell him?"

Joice groaned. He stood up and looked down at her. So this was how he had kept his vow of friendship to her!

"He did not speak of you," he said, sinking again into his seat—"and, Heaven forgive me, I did not tell him anything. You see—it was unexpected. I had not gone there to find him. It was nothing but chance that brought us together. Otherwise—if I had been looking for him—I should have told him—the truth."

"He did not mention my name?" she whispered. "And you say he is contented there—with the new life?"

"How do I know?" returned Joice wearily. "He is busy with his new affairs—with his work and his men. He is a changed man, I

think. He has acted like a fool—and perhaps he is less of a fool now than of old. How do I know?

"I did not try to find out. If he had asked me about you, I think I should have answered his questions to the best of my knowledge. I admire some of his points—but I think it only natural that I do not love him. I owe it to you to speak frankly. Westley is there at Two Moose, in the Smoky River country—and likely to stay there, I imagine."

"Do you think he has forgotten me?" she whispered.

"I should be a fool to think so," he replied. "To be honest—my belief is—that he is trying to forget you."

She moved quickly in her chair at that.

"But why—should he want to forget—if he received my letters?" she asked.

"I do not know," he answered. "They may have gone astray, or he may have destroyed them in a fit of temper. He is not more than human. But he is there in the Smoky River country, at a post of the Hudson Bay Company. This is all I can tell you; and this has been hard enough. I think I should never have told it to you but for the fact that I—saw at a glance —that—well, it is no use."

"I understand you," she said gently. "You

have been—my best friend in all the world. I have not been worthy of your friendship—and I am unworthy now."

"I failed you," he answered huskily. "However, I cannot mend that now—more than I have done already. I am afraid I am not quite such a fine chap as I thought myself. If you will excuse me a minute I will go to my room and write the address for you."

Without waiting for her reply he left his chair and entered the hotel. When he returned to the gallery, five minutes later, he found that the men had returned.

He slipped a folded sheet of letter-paper into Dorothy's hand, then turned to Tom Gordon and suggested a walk into the town. Tom was willing; and as they walked along the white highway the younger man glanced inquiringly at the other's face in the passing of every lighted window. It was a tense face just then, but there was a suggestion of peace about the fearless eyes that somewhat eased Tom's anxiety.

Mr. Gordon moved over to the chair beside Dorothy a minute after the others had gone. Try as he would, he could read nothing in her shadowed face.

He felt very badly. He was worried—worried almost to distraction. Heavens! What ailed the girl. He lit a cigarette and promptly

threw it away. He fumbled for another and dropped the silver case through the railing into the court below. Then he swore.

"Is there to be no end to this?" he cried. "It —it is outrageous. I'll not put up with it. It is breaking your health—to say nothing of mine. And what about Joice now? What is the matter with him now? I hoped that he, at least, had come to his proper senses. Why has he tagged down here after us? I tell you, Dot, I feel desperate. Is there no way out? What does Joice want?"

"Captain Joice—wants nothing—I think," replied Dorothy.

She glanced around the gallery, to see that no other guests of the hotel were within sight or hearing. They were alone on the gallery. She slipped from her chair and dropped to her knees beside her father. She threw her arms around his neck and pressed her face against the bulging front of his shirt.

"Oh, I am a beast!—a selfish beast!" she whispered. "I have thought of nobody—but myself."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed John Angus. "I'll not allow you to say so. It's not your fault. Not a bit of it. Don't pay any attention to what I say, Dot. I don't mean one quarter of what I say. But tell me—do you still feel as you did?"

Dorothy was silent.

"The man is a fool!" exclaimed Gordon. "If I knew where he was hiding himself, I'd go find him and give him a piece of my mind. I'd give him more than that, by thunder. How dare he behave like this? Who the deuce does he think he is, anyway? I'll show him—if I ever get a chance. Men were not such fools and cads in my day. Even Joice is acting like an ass. I hope you have let him see—that it is quite useless for him to follow us about any more?"

"He knows that," whispered Dorothy.

"He seems to require a lot of teaching, poor sinner," said Gordon.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COMING OF SPRING

Up in the Smoky River country the frosty edge of winter began to blur and soften into spring. The noonday sun, which had for so long been a thing of light only—an eye of radiance possessed of no more color and glow than a fragment of window-glass—now shed yellow warmth upon the wilderness.

Westley's lumberjacks unbuttoned their blanket-jumpers and pushed their fur caps far to the backs of their heads. The big horses sweated along the trampled logging-roads. The snow-weighted branches of the spruces dripped every day from ten in the morning until three in the afternoon.

The great drifts along the river and in the glades and clearings of the forest shrank day by day and each night took on a more glistening shell of crust. Black crows appeared, cawing in the high tops of the spruces. And the spirit of awaking filled the air.

There was magic in it. The magic showed in a softening of lines in David Westley's tanned face; in a more sprightly note in Mr.

Duff's voice; in Pierre MacKim's appearance each noon before the door of his mother's cabin.

Choppers and teamsters, cooks, "swampers," and yard-tenders sang at their work. The factor worked less steadily at his novels, wrote some verses, and wandered about the post. The first of the fur-takers came in from the distant trapping-grounds—an old man who did not feel equal to waiting for the killing of the musquash at the season of flood-water. Piles of yellow boards and heaps of yellow sawdust grew high around the mill day by day.

Gabe Bear, coming in from his official trip to St. Anne's, reported the "Push-an'-be-darn" rapids open water from shore to shore. Old Dominic Benoit sawed away at his fiddle with his back to the stove and his face to the open door. The hammered bottoms of the logging-roads began to rot and let the horses through to the shoulder.

The heart of Marie Benoit drank deep of the spirit of the season, awoke from its winter sleep, and began to sing a new song all of its own. The heart of David Westley also awoke; but it, unlike Marie's, yearned backward on its quest.

Even Dr. Dixon did not escape the magical awakening of the season. Busy as he was, he went one evening to Dominic Benoit's cabin to listen to that old humbug play on his fiddle.

Marie was there—and the doctor, after all, was only two years out of McGill.

Of late she had found the nursing of Pierre but dull work, and it may be that the doctor had found things a trifle dull, too. He was charmed with Dominic's fiddling and called to hear it again the next evening—and the next.

David Westley, after a busy day at the camps and a late dinner with the factor, looked in at Rosie's cabin for a chat with Pierre. A sense of disturbance touched him as he entered. Rosie looked angry and Pierre's thin face was clouded.

Pierre sat in a big chair that David had borrowed for him from the factor's house. He rose slowly, for he was still weak, and extended his hand. Rosie's face lightened at sight of David.

"What's up?" asked Westley. "Anything gone wrong?"

"It is not much," said Pierre. "It is only that I do not get my strength back so quick as I want. But it is wrong for me to say that, for I'd be under the snow now but for you, boss."

"There is plenty gone wrong, *monsieur,*" exclaimed Rosie. "Oh, I tell you, sair, it is not the strength that make my boy unhappy. I tell you the truth, *monsieur,* for you are the great man—the master of this country. It is that girl. I tell you, Monsieur le Boss, it is Marie."

"An' I beg you, my good, kind friend, don't listen to my mother," cried Pierre.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Westley, accepting a chair from Rosie. "What game has Marie been up to now?"

He said it with a perfect assurance of manner, but in the back of his heart he felt misgivings, remembering several moments of weakness and wondering if anything of these had come at last to Pierre's ears.

"Oh, she is a mad thing," replied Rosie, gesturing effectively with one hand and a frying-pan. "She is not steadfast. Her face is too pretty a thing—and her heart, it goes like the wind. It was not so with me, *monsieur*, when I was young an' so pretty as Marie. My heart, was it not steadfast?"

"What has the girl done?" asked David, ready for the worst. "I—I have heard nothing."

"You, *monsieur!*" cried Rosie. "What would you hear that was not fair to your poor friend? What you see that was not good? Oh, I know, *monsieur*. I have the eyes, sharp to see. But you—your eyes were too high. You overlooked her head. You did not know. Is it not so, *monsieur?*"

"It is not so," said Pierre.

"I don't know what you are driving at," said David.

"Then I tell you. She have a wild heart, that girl, an' a great ambition. She look at Monsieur le Factor; but Donal' Grant, he see no farther past his nose, *monsieur*.

"So she content herself a little with Pierre; and his head go 'round. Then you come, *monsieur*—an' oh, she never yet see so great a *monsieur* as you yourself. But you see only the big work, an' something back on your heart, an' maybe you think Marie have pretty eyes—but you don't care."

David felt decidedly uncomfortable and burned a finger in trying to light his pipe. Pierre groaned; then cried out that his mother had no right to talk so.

"So she content herself again, a little with Pierre," continued Rosie. "Then you bring Monsieur le Doctor to save the life of Pierre. An' now that girl, she set her heart at the doctor—an' Pierre sit here in his chair, an' what can he do?"

Westley's sudden relief was followed by displeasure not unmixed with amusement.

"It is a pity," he said. "But I think Marie is—well, a good girl. Perhaps her heart is not very steadfast, as you say—but plenty of hearts are like the wind. Pierre, if I were you I'd either stop worrying about Marie or I'd go look for a less attractive face and a more

steadfast heart. I am sorry for you, but, upon my soul, I don't see what is to be done in the matter."

"I think a man is just a fool as that—to die because his girl go back on him," said Rosie.

"Let us hope that Pierre is not quite such a fool as that," returned David.

"I feel pretty bad," said Pierre weakly. "Steve Canadian, he cut pretty deep with that knife. But Marie, she too fine a girl for me, anyhow. She best marry some fine feller, I guess—an' some feller who ain't sick, like me."

The doctor was at one of the camps that evening, attending to a man who had shorn off a couple of toes with a glancing ax-blade.

David Westley left the MacKim cabin early and went to Dominic Benoit's. Marie opened the door to him. Her dark eyes brightened and her high color faded a little at the sight of the visitor. The old man sat close to the stove, with his fiddle in his lap. David sat down near Marie.

He talked to her in a low voice, and though he stammered a great deal and often hung fire for a word, he managed to put the case straight to her.

"Of course, if you do not really care for Pierre, he must take his chances—and you will oblige me by forgetting what I have said," he concluded.

The girl began to weep quietly. Dominic blinked his eyes at her, shot a corner-wise glance at Westley, spat at the front of the stove, and began sawing away on the fiddle.

Westley puffed steadily on his pipe, trying to comfort himself with the reflection that he had at least made an attempt to do his duty to Pierre MacKim. He turned again to the sobbing girl. He put out his hand and touched her arm.

"I think he will get his strength back if he gets happiness," he said. "But you must be sure. Do not do as I have asked you unless you are sure of yourself—or until you are sure."

For a moment Marie trembled beneath the light but firm touch of his hand. Then, suddenly, as if with sore effort, she drew away from him. For an instant she withdrew her hands from her face and her black eyes flashed full into his.

"I love Pierre—and I hate you!" she whispered.

David reddened and his jaw slackened. He had not expected this.

He had never suspected her hate. Far from it. What had he ever done to inspire Marie Benoit's hate? He stared back at her foolishly, but she only hid her face again. He looked at old Dominic, but that worthy was fa- too

busily engaged with his fiddle to be of any help.

"I am sorry you hate me," said David. "I thought we were very good friends. But I am glad that you feel as you do toward poor MacKim—and even though you dislike me I will do as I have said. Pierre MacKim will be a big man in this country."

"Go back—to that girl—you leave in—New York," retorted Marie through her tear-wet fingers and between her sobs.

Poor David sighed, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and left the cabin. He reflected bitterly that he didn't seem to know how to get along with young and attractive women, even when his intentions were of the best. He dropped a hint to Dr. Dixon next morning.

"It isn't the game for a chap like you to put fool ideas into the head of a girl like Marie Benoit," he said.

The young doctor reddened, then whistled.

"Ideas be darned," he said; and then, "Oh, well, you are the boss here."

Marie spent the greater part of the next day with Pierre. The doctor lost his interest in Dominic's music.

David tried to forget what the girl had said to him, kept out of her way, and went on with his work. But he was hurt and bewildered. He described the interview to Donald Grant, and

the factor-novelist laughed heartily for the first time in weeks.

Spring arrived full-blooded, full-fledged, with two days of warm, steady rain after a week of steady sunshine and south winds. The big river broke its shell of rotted gray ice. Fed by all the melted snows of millions of acres of forest and barren, by the rain, and a hundred brooks and little rivers, it flooded out from its fastnesses to its final outlet in the great St. Lawrence.

It passed Two Moose freighted with uprooted trees and fifty miles of broken ice. It flooded the valleys to right and left with gray water and sodden ice-pans. It snatched away thousands of Westley's logs and rushed them down with the grinding ice and fragments of torn forest.

Twenty of Westley's men were sent down river with the head of the flood, to try to keep the ice and logs from jambing anywhere. There were several bad spots in the course of Smoky, between Two Moose and St. Anne's, that were sure to hold all the logs save a few happening to ride on the very crest of the freshet.

Westley expected to have to blast the rocky bed of the river at these points, after the water had fallen, before he could get his "drive" down to the big mill at St. Anne's. But this year's flood was higher than usual and fully two-thirds of Westley's "cut" went clean through on the

tail of the ice and safely into the booms at the mill below.

This alone put the winter's operations on the right side of the ledger, and the chances were that the balance of the lumber would be run safely to market at the expense of a little dynamite.

The trappers of the post came in from the west and north and northeast, some hauling sleds over the last skim of snow, some steering battered canoes down the swollen streams, and still others drifting in after the snow had all vanished and the waters were subsiding, with their winter's "take" topped off with muskrat skins.

CHAPTER XIX

DAVID MAKES A RESOLUTION

On the day following his talk with Dorothy Gordon, on the gallery of the big hotel in Barbados, Walter Joice set out for one of the other islands. He could not make up his mind as to where to go or what to do. He worked slowly northward, and in May found himself back in New York.

The Gordons remained in the islands until the first of May, and then sailed straight for home. Dorothy's spirits had shown a decided change for the better ever since her last meeting with the captain; but of what she had heard of David Westley she said nothing to her father.

She had to discover, once and for all, the truth of David Westley's heart, and she was determined not to let anything come between her plans and this discovery. She could not entertain the belief for a moment that David had ceased to love her or had forgotten her.

She had heard something, between Joice's spoken words, that had renewed her hope. What she feared was her father's well-intentioned but blundering assistance.

She must go to David, and she knew that this was what her father would never be talked into permitting. So she made her plans and kept them warm and secret in her own heart. It was not until early in June that she made known her plans to her brother Tom. Tom considered them somewhat fearfully at first, but soon with enthusiasm.

David was his friend and one of his heroes. He had flattered himself for years that he understood and knew the real David better than most people. Also, he agreed with Dorothy that if John Angus took a hand in the game, which was a delicate one, surely, tact would not be practised and temper would be given full swing—and the affair would be damned eternally.

Tom and Dorothy arranged for a trip north, for the fishing. This was a half-truth, and the telling of it to their father hurt their tongues like a lie.

The old man agreed to the arrangement without a murmur. He was glad to hear that the girl felt an interest in fishing—in anything. As he could not go himself, because of a pressure of work after his idle winter, he trusted her to Tom with an easy heart.

So the brother and sister went north. In Quebec they perfected their plans. A few days later, in that town in which David had bought

his outfit and arranged for a guide the previous autumn, they also outfitted for the wilderness.

Up in David Westley's country men were working at the rock bed of the river. The mill buzzed and ripped all day long, shacks were being built of bright new lumber, and land was being cleared and burned, and wheat and oats sown in the ashes among the stumps.

David himself took a hand in everything, now "sacking" logs along the river, now helping the dynamiters clear the stream of an outcrop of rocks, and sweating in the blackened clearings that were so soon to flow pale green with the first blade of the first harvest.

Then, very suddenly one night, while he was sitting with Duff in the manager's office, something that had stirred within him more than once since the first tremor of spring found its voice. He laid his pipe on the corner of the table and looked fixedly at Duff.

"I am going out," he said. "I may as well start in the morning."

"Out!" exclaimed Duff, with consternation in his voice and round face. "Out! What the deuce do you mean? You wouldn't drop it now?"

"No fear," returned David. "I'll be back within the month, perhaps sooner. I have something to see to in New York—something to make certain of. I may as well do it now as later."

"You'll never come back," said Duff mournfully. "The old life will hold you—and this work will go to the dogs. Whatever the thing is that takes you out will keep you out."

"No danger of that," said David, laughing shortly. "The conditions that could make me stay out do not come in my calculations at all. I want to make dead sure of something that I am not quite sure of now. I'll feel easier if I know the worst—everything, I mean. I can't explain it to you."

"Am I to go on with this job if you don't come back?" asked Duff.

"I mean to come back," said Westley.

Westley awoke before dawn and shaved and dressed by lamplight. He breakfasted, then opened the door and looked out, in the first light, across the clearing and the wide river to the clean, still forests beyond and the dim shapes of the hills.

The breath of the awaking world—of morning and young June—drifted fresh and fragrant against his face. And his purpose wavered a little, and Duff's words of gloom rang a ghost of an echo in his heart.

"I can do no good by going," he murmured, "but I will go."

He looked at his watch. The men and the canoe would be ready in half an hour. His knapsack and bag were packed. He locked the

door and carried his baggage over to the veranda of the factor's house.

It was here he had told the canoemen they should find it. He lit his pipe, and then a casual glance along the side of the house showed him the corner of a curtain suddenly let fall.

Wondering what Grant was up to at so early an hour, he went to the front door and knocked briskly. Grant himself opened the door. He showed a face of consternation in the growing light. He flashed out a hand and yanked his visitor into the hall, then shut the door swiftly and softly.

"What the deuce is the matter now?" asked David.

"Did you see Steve Canadian hanging round outside?" whispered the factor, with trembling hands on the other's arm.

"No," replied David. "Steve Canadian hasn't come back—and never will. What's the matter with you?"

"He is back," said Grant. "Lord, man, don't I know? And here I am, caught like a rat in a trap! If he had waited a little longer I'd have given him the slip. But I haven't the money. The publisher will be sending it soon. Heaven! to be caught like this, just for want of a little money!"

"You'd better sit down and cool off," said David, "and tell me about it. Why do you

think Steve Canadian is back?—and why are you in such a funk? The man can't touch you. He can't harm your future."

"I saw him," said the factor. "I awoke early and looked out of the window—bedroom window—and saw him sneaking around. Then I came downstairs and loaded my revolver, to be ready for him."

"You are a coward," said David.

"He means to kill me. But, by Heaven, I'll kill him this time."

"You are crazy."

"No, I am not," retorted Grant. "I may be a coward, but I'm not crazy."

He told Westley of what had happened that night in the woods.

"You did the right thing when you let him have it," said Westley, "but why didn't you tell me about it, instead of worrying over it like this? You have been tearing your nerves, Grant. But are you sure it was Canadian you saw this morning? It might have been one of my men."

"It was Canadian," replied Grant. "Of course, I couldn't see his face—and the chances are that—that his face is not as it used to be. Heaven, the fellow must have nine lives."

David heard footsteps on the floor of the veranda. He shoved the factor into the sitting-

room and opened the door. His two half-breed canoemen stood there.

"I'm not going out this morning," he said. "Take these things over to my shack."

He returned to Grant for a moment, told him not to worry, and then followed the men over to his cabin. He decided to postpone his trip back to civilization until after he had settled this affair of the bad Indian.

As neither the factor nor the police seemed able to deal with Steve, it was evidently up to him to put that rascal out of the way of future mischief. He said nothing to Duff about Grant's fear that Steve had returned, but he kept within close touch with the post all day.

He saw and heard nothing of the bad man. After his lonely supper (the doctor was at one of the camps), Pierre came over to see him. Pierre was greatly improved in health and spirits, though he was still weak. He could not walk a short distance without the help of his stick. He came to talk about the past and the future and to thank David for all his kindnesses.

David at last managed to swing the conversation away from his own virtues. They smoked —and in time, both fell silent. The shaded lamp on the table of unpainted deal threw a circumscribed patch of light straight down and

no farther out than the edges of the table. Both men sat in the outer shadow.

The night was dark but warm. The window stood open and the door hung on its wooden latch. On the table, fair in the circle of yellow light, lay six or eight hundred dollars in paper and gold—money which Westley had commenced to count and arrange for pay-day before Pierre's arrival.

The men had been silent and motionless for about fifteen minutes when a slight sound on the floor caused Westley to shake his dreams and turn his head. And Pierre, who sat nearer to the table, looked up at the same moment. There, leaning forward out of the shadow, with one hand about to descend upon the money, stood a man.

A little shaft of light beating straight up from the top of the lamp touched his face. It was the sight of this face that held David in his chair as if spellbound. There was only one eye in the face—one red, devilish eye glaring down at the money. The other eye was lost in a ragged red scar. No, it was still more of a wound than a scar. The nose was broken hideously.

Both David and Pierre sat motionless in their chairs, horror-stricken. The hand fell upon a heap of green paper. Then the red eye turned and encountered David's horrified

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David wrenched and swung with all his strength.
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regard. It moved no farther. The other hand shot out of the shadow with a bared knife in it. But quick as hand and knife were, Pierre MacKim was quicker.

The frail body that had come so slowly and haltingly across the clearing a few hours before now flashed forward as if it were all fire and sinew. The two bodies reeled and spun about like one, and the only sound they made was their heavy breathing. The knife, striving and twisting behind Pierre's back for a chance to strike, flashed and darkened and flashed again in the yellow light. An elbow had struck up the green shade of the lamp.

The fighters reeled against the edge of the table. Then David Westley recovered from his astonishment and horror, sprang around the table, with his left hand gripped the menacing wrist and with his right shot across Pierre's shoulder and caught Steve Canadian by the throat.

He was not a second too soon, for on the instant Pierre went limp and hung like a dead thing in his enemy's arms. David wrenched and swung with all his strength. Pierre slid to the floor, encumbering Canadian's feet.

The bad Indian lost his balance, and David flung him clear of the floor and half-way across the table. Over went table and lamp, with the money clattering broadcast and the cursing

murderer riding the crest of the ruin. The room winked black for a second or two, then showed the flickering, crawling flame of the broken lamp upon the floor.

David, his blood thoroughly up, sprang forward in the darkness. A gust of outer air puffed upon him and then the door banged in his face. He turned and gave all his attention to the spilled and burning oil.

CHAPTER XX

"UP STREAM OR DOWN?"

Steve Canadian did not wait to learn what damage he had done to Pierre MacKim, or to settle his score with Donald Grant. Throat and wrist ached from the grip of David Westley's fingers.

In that brief, wild struggle he had read all that he cared to know of the big American's character, and fear had singed him. He knew that from now on there would be no rest for his feet, no hiding-place for his head within a hundred miles of Two Moose.

He snatched his rifle from the outer wall beside the door and ran down to the river. Launching the first canoe he came to, he put out upon the black river. He paddled and drifted with the current, keeping close to the left shore. So for a couple of hours; and then, during one of his periods of silent drifting, he heard the dip and drip of a paddle in front of him, coming slowly nearer in the black shadow of the wooded bank.

At that sound he stilled his very breath, and

every muscle became motionless and tense. Rage got the better of fear in his heart. He was desperate, beaten, outcast, stripped to the bone. He had failed in his mission of revenge and his attempt at robbery.

His pockets were empty—and here, coming upstream to him in the dark, was Gabe Bear with the mail-bag for Two Moose. There would be money in that bag, he felt sure—one or more express packets of money addressed to David Westley.

So he listened intently, getting the exact position of the unseen canoe by the sound of the dipping paddle. Then he slipped the blade of his own paddle into the water, swung the bow shoreward a little, and stroked without so much as the ghost of a sound.

The night was dark, and in the shadow of the wooded bank river and air were black as the pit. Steve turned his canoe until he was headed upstream and a little toward the left shore. He put out his hand and touched the bow of the other canoe.

He edged it shoreward, very gently, maintaining his own position by working his paddle cautiously and silently with his left hand. The progress of the mail-runner's canoe was slightly retarded and its course altered to a marked degree. Gabe tried to swing back to his course. He did not speak, for he had heard many stories

of the evil spirits of the river, and the playful spirits thereof, and took every one of them for gospel.

It was death to a mortal to exchange so much as one word with any spirit of the river. The best thing he could do—the only thing, was to keep on paddling and hope that the spirit that had laid hold of the bow of his canoe was of the playful variety. And now both canoes swung around and drifted down the stream.

Steve guessed what was in the other's mind and rejoiced at it. The canoes touched the shore. Then Steve yanked the trembling Gabe to the rocks, flung him down, gagged and bound him.

By the light of matches he found a packet of money and a bottle of whisky. He tasted the whisky and found it good. He drank deep, and the glow of it went up swiftly into his brain. He lifted Gabe Bear into Gabe's own canoe, still bound and gagged, and launched him upon the black stream.

"You'd best git back to where you come from," he said.

He flung the heavy leather mail-bag into the water, shouldered Gabe's kit and followed the vanished canoe and voyager downstream, a-foot, leaving his own canoe lying on the rocks, half in and half out of the water.

"When that Westley finds the canoe he'll say I take to the woods," he said.

In the meantime Dorothy and Tom Gordon had reached St. Anne's and found a guide and a canoe. This guide was a white man—outside. He had been born right in St. Anne's (so he said), but had been wandering about the world for the past twelve or fifteen years.

It was evident that he had not prospered in the outer world. He agreed to take the pair up to the post, supply the canoe, and do the cooking as well as the "heft" of the canoe work, for the moderate return of three dollars a day.

The Gordons were in too great a hurry to get away on the last and most picturesque stage of their journey to pay any attention to the face of their guide. They started upstream at daybreak. Dorothy took Tom's place in the bow of the canoe, when they re-embarked after dinner, and paddled eagerly.

Towly, the guide, kept in the stern of the canoe, sometimes kneeling and plying the paddle, at other times standing and surging on the long pole of white spruce. He said little, but watched the face of whichever one of his employers sat facing him with veiled eyes and a twisted mouth.

He was a good canoeman, artful and strong. The first day's progress was entirely satisfactory, and the first night passed without accident. Dorothy occupied a small "V" tent and Tom and the guide an open-faced lean-to.

They were off again before sunrise, Dorothy and Tom in high spirits, and Towly as silent as before, but showing a little more alertness about the eyes.

One portage was made that day and some swift water was climbed. Again camp was made and the evening meal cooked and eaten. All retired early to their blankets.

Tom awoke in the first gray pallor of dawn and sat up with a sharp sense of calamity. Towly and his blankets were gone. He lit a match and looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. Throwing aside his blankets he passed the fallen camp-fire and went over to Dorothy's tent.

Peeping through the laced flap he saw that she was sleeping soundly. He looked around for the guide, and listened for the thump of the ax. He saw nothing of him, however, and heard no sounds of chopping. The light grew; and he saw, with a catch in his throat, that the canoe was not on the bank where it had been left the night before.

And where was the dunnage? The camp wore an air of desolation. He ran to the edge of the water and gazed up and down the bank and the misty stream for the canoe and Towly.

The crawling mists of the night hid the middle of the river, and perhaps the canoe as well. He reflected that the guide may have gone out

to catch some trout for breakfast; but, on second thought, why should he take the dunnage with him? His throat felt pinched and dry. He searched the camp, swiftly and silently.

Of the provisions that had been placed beside the lean-to nothing remained but a small jar of sliced bacon that had evidently slipped from the bag. Then he remembered that a twenty-pound bag of flour had been put in Dorothy's tent, by the girl herself, for fear of dews. He peeped into the tent again and saw his sister sitting up and staring at him.

"Is the flour there?" he asked, his voice somewhat husky.

"Yes, it is here," she replied. "Is Towly thinking of frying pancakes for breakfast?"

"He has gone off somewhere with the canoe —and with most of the grub," returned Tom, dully. "Perhaps he's gone fishing—but what would he want of the grub?"

Dorothy sprang to her feet and hastily unfastened the flap of the tent. Her face was pale and her eyes flashed.

"He has deserted us," she cried. "We should have known that he was not to be trusted by his eyes and mouth. What else has he taken? He would not desert us with nothing but a little food and his own canoe, you may be sure. Is your money safe?"

"The wad is gone," said Tom, feeling in

every pocket. "By thunder, the bounder has cleaned me out! But the money wouldn't be of any use to us just now, anyway. The canoe and the grub are the things we can't do without."

"Have you looked everywhere for the grub—and the canoe?" she asked.

"Everywhere," he replied, and showed her the jar of bacon.

"We'll wait for a couple of hours, Dot, and then start back for St. Anne's on foot," he said. "It's the only thing for us to do. We have enough grub to last us back to the village. It'll be hard walking."

Dorothy was silent for a moment, staring about the camp and out at the mist on the brightening river with defiant eyes. Her smooth, white forehead was clouded with thought. Her beautiful hair fell about her shoulders.

She wore the long garment of fine blanket in which she had slept, and her small, white feet shone in the dew of the moss like new ivory. There was no sign of fear in face or attitude. At last, after questioning wood and stream, her brow cleared. Her eyes met Tom's anxious gaze. She stepped up to him and placed her hands on his arm.

"We have food enough," she said. "We can catch plenty of trout—and we have the flour,

and bacon, and a packet of tea—our special tea. We are almost half-way to Two Moose, if the distance is seventy miles, as we have been told. So I think we may as well go on."

"Go on," said Tom, dully. "We haven't made more than thirty miles, I think—and that would give us forty miles to go. Ten more than if we beat back for the village. Ten miles! Dot, I think we had better try to shake that extra ten. The walking isn't easy."

"I want to go right on," returned the girl. "We have food enough, if we can catch a few fish every evening. My rod and tackle are in my tent. I want to get to Two Moose—and I don't mean to be turned by a matter of ten extra miles. We can walk forty as well as we can thirty."

"Confound that beast!" cried Tom, his smoldering anger suddenly bursting into flame. "If I had him here I'd break his dirty neck!"

"Please make up the fire and put on the kettle while I dress," said Dorothy quietly. "See, there is the kettle hanging on that little birch. I'm glad he overlooked it."

She went into her tent and Tom threw some bark and dry branches on the red coals at the heart of the fire. He then found that his belt-ax had not been taken by the robber, and that his water-tight box of matches was full and safe.

By this time the mist was nearly all gone

from the sliding face of the river, and the first sun-rays were flooding in over the eastern forests. He chopped and split some wood, built up the fire, and filled and hung the kettle.

Then he wandered up the shore for a few hundred yards, and down it, gazing helplessly at wood and river and cursing the unspeakable Towly. For himself it was no great matter. He was strong and fit and more or less accustomed to roughing it; but when he pictured that struggle afoot through the forest and along the ragged edge of the river for Dorothy—through tough underbrush, and over and under crisscrossed windfalls, and through all manner of swamps and bogs—he glowed with rage and chilled with apprehension.

He was disgusted with events and himself. He should not have trusted Towly. He should not have engaged a man with such a bad eye. Thirty miles downstream, forty miles upstream.

He struggled with the problem and the choice. He knew that his sister was as good for the forty as for the thirty; but he wondered if her health and strength were equal to either journey. He returned to camp and found the tea ready and a few slices of bacon frying on a hot stone.

Dorothy was bright as a cricket. She had made a pack of the bag of flour and the

blankets, for Tom, and another of the belt-ax, fishing-rod, and her own clothing for herself.

"Up or down?" asked Tom, after breakfast, swinging his small pack to his shoulder.

"Up," she said.

"Well, Dot, though we'll regret these extra ten miles when we come to them, I can't help admiring your pluck."

"Pluck," she said, smiling a trifle wanly. "My dear boy, deciding to start upon the first stage of the journey, by parlor-car from New York, required more pluck than this."

The day was fine and not too warm, and for several miles they had fairly clear footing along the edge of the sliding current. Later, a steep bank, without foothold, forced them back into the brush for a short distance.

Dorothy set the pace, in spite of Tom's objections, and would not relinquish the lead. She was light on her feet and possessed of more endurance than Tom had suspected. The pace that she set was quite fast enough for the young man. They camped at noon, ate, and rested for an hour. Tom took the lead after lunch, and they struggled slowly through several miles of wind-torn, fire-scarred land.

They issued from that piece of wilderness considerably the worse for wear. They rested several times during the afternoon, and bathed their hands and faces in the river. Black-flies,

caribou-flies, sand-flies, and mosquitoes were all attentive and active.

Their supply of fly-oil, for the protection of their hands and faces, had been taken by Towly. Tom lit smudges whenever they stopped to rest. By sundown Dorothy was limping a little, and her face was specked with blood; but her temper was unruffled.

As they had left their tents behind them, to save their backs, Tom made camp in the open, on beds of spruce-boughs beside a roaring fire that held the flies of all varieties at bay.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CANOE

Dorothy and Tom awoke next morning to find every muscle cramped and every bone weary and their eyes almost closed by the swelling bites and stings of the flies.

"Easy does it," said Tom. "I think we'd be wise to stay in camp until noon. You look just about all in."

"We must press forward while we can," said Dorothy. "It does not matter about being tired. The flies are the things that I am afraid of; and I think we had better get to the post before we are poisoned."

Dorothy had her way, and they limped out of camp after an early and simple repast of stoned-fried bacon and fried dough. Dorothy would not wait even long enough for Tom to cast for a couple of trout.

They followed a portage-track around a roaring fall. They moved slowly and painfully, fighting flies with their free hands, crushing the pests where they found them, and so smearing their necks and faces with their own blood.

Dorothy's skirts were in ribbons, in spite of the fact that they were all-wool and very short, and her high-laced boots were scratched and cut. She stumbled once on the narrow, rocky trail of the portage. They rounded the head of rough water at last and limped down to the river.

They knelt at the edge of the cool, swift water and splashed themselves from head to foot; and still the flies hummed and sang around them in clouds. Dorothy removed her shoes and stockings and bathed her feet. She showed a couple of blisters which Tom operated upon successfully with a needle that Towly had thoughtfully left them.

After a brief rest they continued their journey, keeping close to the edge of the river, along a narrow strip of pebbles. They soon came to a rocky point, around which they scrambled with difficulty, and to a small cove beyond.

The current had gnawed its way far into the bank at this point; and Tom groaned when he saw that they would lose several hundred yards in getting around it.

"Look at that!" cried Dorothy. "Look there! A canoe!"

Tom let fall his pack and cleared his face of flies with both hands. Yes, there lay a canoe,

in shallow water, caught between two stranded logs in the back-water of the cove.

"Yes, it's a canoe. Thank God for that!" he exclaimed.

"There is something in it!" cried Dorothy. "Come quick! It is something alive—and bound down. It is a man!"

They hastened over the tumbled rocks and bruising pebbles to the inner pocket of the cove, where the canoe, logs, and drift-stuff lay stranded within a few hundred yards of the roaring falls below.

The girl halted within a few steps of the canoe and turned away from it.

"You look," she whispered. "I am afraid. Who is it?"

Tom splashed out heavily and laid hold of the gunwale of the light craft. He cleared his eyes of the stinging sweat and looked within.

Yes, it was a man, bound hand and foot, lying face down in the bottom of the canoe—mercifully face down. He struggled, lay still for a few seconds, then struggled again. His hands, bound at the small of his back by the wrists, were black with flies and red with blood and swollen to the size of great gloves. For a second or two Tom Gordon stared into the canoe, horror-stricken.

He recovered his wits with an oath, ripped

out a knife and cut the blood-soaked thongs at the stranger's wrists. The swollen, blackened hands slid like dead things from the quivering back to the shelter of the quivering sides.

Then Tom found other thongs and cut them. Then he splashed water into the canoe, and shouted to the stranger that all was well.

"Who is it?" cried Dorothy. "And what is the matter with him?"

Gabe Bear struggled like a worm, turned himself over at last, and sat up slowly. One eye was closed by a cut above it, received when Steve Canadian had thrown him down upon the rocks the night before. But, thanks to Steve's oversight in binding him face downward, the flies had been forced to content themselves with his hands, wrists, and neck.

"My Lord, you don't happen 'long any too soon," he said.

His voice was no more than a cracked whisper, for his jaws were stiff to breaking and his tongue swollen from the gag. He gazed from one to the other with his single open eye.

"Gimme a drink," he said. He drank greedily out of Tom's felt hat. Then he leaned over one gunwale of the canoe and plunged his poor, bloated hands into the water.

Dorothy, watching with eyes wide and shadowed with pity, turned suddenly to Tom, clasped

him around the neck, and began to cry. Tom was staggered. He braced himself to support and comfort her.

"The canoe," she sobbed. "Now we have a canoe again. We do not have to walk another step—except around the rapids."

Tom had been too greatly astonished and horror-stricken to think of what the canoe meant to himself and his sister.

Dazed with the raw shock and wonder of recent events, half sickened with the stings of insects, he had seen nothing but the poor fellow whom he had loosed from the thongs. Now he shouted with the joy of vast relief, and flung his arms around Dorothy. They clung to one another, their hearts swelling with thankfulness at this sudden turn of fortune.

"What a thing to cry about!" exclaimed Tom, laughing wildly.

The man in the canoe stared at them with his one serviceable eye.

His dusky face was colorless, and he leaned weakly against the middle bar of the canoe, with his hands hanging into the water over the gunwale. For a minute he neither spoke nor blinked, staring at his deliverers. He could not make them out—that beautiful, tattered young woman who was not of the country, and that big, unusual young man.

"Quit it," he said at last. "You holler too

soon, maybe. My name Gabe Bear. I run the mails—an' las' night I get robbed an' set to drif' downstream an' over the fall. You bes' quit laughin' an' hollerin' an' git into this here canoe. I guess you frien's of David? Quicker you git to the post better for you. Quit yer kissin'."

Tom retraced his steps for a short distance and picked up the flour, blankets, and fishing-rod. Dorothy dried her eyes and laughed at Gabe Bear.

"That is my brother," she said. "Our name is Gordon. Yes, we are going up-river to see David Westley. We are his friends."

Gabe looked uneasily around with his open eye.

"David, he got plenty money to have plenty frien's," he said. "Him big man on Smoky River, you bet. I never see girl kiss her brother before. Where yer guide an' canoe, anyhow?"

Dorothy told him of the desertion of Towly. Gabe cried out with indignation.

"Shucks!" he cried in a ragged voice. "This river ain't safe. Full of bad men. Steve Canadian an' Bill Towly. Steve watch us now, maybe."

Then he sank back, hung limp over the bar, and closed his eye in a dead faint. Dorothy and Tom lifted him from the canoe and laid him down beside the river. The girl carried

water in Tom's hat and bathed the dusky, bloodless face. Tom made a small fire and converted it into a smudge by piling damp moss upon it.

"He needs a snifter," said Tom, feeling for his flask through his empty pockets. "Cuss that unspeakable Towly."

They crouched low in the smoke of the smudge. At last Gabe Bear opened the eye that was not held shut by the purple lump on the brow.

"Rum," he whispered. "Rum. We gotter git up an' git."

"I have no rum—or anything of the kind," said Tom. "Towly took my flask. Where is your own flask?"

Gabe sighed. "I have one bottle—whisky—Steve take him."

"Let me fry you some bacon," suggested Tom. "You must be hungry."

A look of unutterable disgust twisted the woodsman's face. He laid one of his puffed, raw hands upon the buckle of his belt and groaned. "Bacum," he whispered. "Bacum?—an' I ax for rum!"

Tom looked ashamed of himself and laughed uneasily.

"I am afraid the poor fellow is very ill," said Dorothy. "Food is not what he wants. I will bandage his head, Tom. Let me have a piece

of your shirt for bandages. Have we any arnica?"

"No, but Bill Towly has," replied Tom.

He pulled off his outer shirt, which was one of fine linen, though made in the shape and style of an outing-shirt, ripped it down the back with his knife, and handed both portions to Dorothy. Gabe Bear looked on with every sign of distaste.

"Maybe Steve—he foller me," he mumbled. "Maybe he spy—at us—now. We got—no—time—fer foolin'."

"Perhaps he's right," suggested Tom. "Whoever this Steve Canadian may be, this chap seems to be everlastingly scared of him. Perhaps we had better embark and push along upstream. Look here, Gabe, why do you think Steve has followed you? You have nothing more about you for him to take."

"Steve Canadian—him one devil," replied Gabe. "Drink my whisky—then tie me in canoe—an' push me out into current."

"If Steve Canadian turns up I think we can deal with him," said Dorothy. "Your head must be bandaged, anyway."

Gabe sighed as he saw the futility of further protest. Dorothy tied up his head in wet strips of Tom's shirt. He staggered to the canoe and climbed aboard, seating himself amidships.

"Hurry! Hurry!" he cried.

Tom put the scanty dunnage aboard and then swore roundly.

"We haven't a pole or a paddle!" he exclaimed in disgust.

"Cut a pole, you fool," said Gabe wearily. "Spruce."

Tom climbed the bank with his belt-ax and began to search for a young spruce that would be suitable for his purpose. He had never cut a canoe-pole before. He examined the timber with uncertain eyes. He saw plenty of young spruce, but nothing that looked as if it would fill the bill. After ten minutes of fruitless examination, he felled a tree that promised as well as any other within sight.

This was in a small natural clearing behind the top of the bank. He began to trim the young tree of its branches, stooping low to the work because of the shortness of the ax-handle. A slight sound, detected by the spirit rather than the ear, caused him to glance up quickly.

He faced the thicket of young growth from which he had cut the pole. What he saw in the green dusk of the thicket caused his heart to jump in his breast and every muscle to stiffen and clamp upon his bones. A slow chill went down the entire length of his back like the passage of a frozen hand.

He stared back at the thing in the green dusk with starting eyes. What he saw was a face—doubtless the face of Steve Canadian. If so, Gabe's anxiety was not to be wondered at. He scarcely knew it for a human face.

The one eye that glared out at him was red with the light of a devil or a hunting beast. He reflected, feebly but swiftly, that it seemed to be a field-day for single eyes. Flickers of absurdity often relieve the human mind in moments of the most desperate tension. The great scar, still red and rough as a wound, that clove the place where the other eye had once been, filled him with horror.

"I got my rifle," said a voice from the distorted face. "Lay down the ax an' gimme yer money."

Tom looked down at the ax in his hands. His brain began to work again and his muscles eased and limbered themselves along his bones. The fellow had a rifle and would use it, he reflected—and yet?

No, it could not be done. A finger can be pressed upon a trigger more swiftly than even a light ax can be swung and thrown.

Steve may have read Tom's thoughts. Considering his mishap at the hands of Donald Grant, it is quite likely. His eye wavered to the belt-ax, and for a second horror curdled in him. The barrel of the rifle leaped out to within a

couple of yards of Tom's breast. Tom let his fingers relax, and the ax fell to the mossy ground. He straightened his long back.

"You have come to the wrong shop for money," he said. "I was robbed by Bill Towly a couple of nights ago."

"Yer a liar," retorted Steve Canadian, stepping out from the cover.

Tom sprang at him quick as thought, shouting a warning to his sister and Gabe Bear.

Steve reeled before the impact (for the bottle was empty now), but managed to press the trigger. The rifle exploded within a foot of Tom's face, and the bullet went humming over his head. His hands were out, ready to grab and throw the Indian, when the rifle-barrel, moved with a swift half-arm yank, caught him on the side of the head just behind the ear. He reeled forward and fell, carrying Steve Canadian with him to the moss.

CHAPTER XXII

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

When Dorothy and Gabe Bear heard Tom's shout of warning from beyond the top of the bank, Gabe uttered a gurgling scream and went limp again in the bottom of the canoe.

Dorothy did not give him a glance. She snatched up her rod, in its canvas case, gripped the lighter end of it, and sped toward the steep ascent of the bank.

Now this rod of hers, though useful for trout, had been built heavy enough for salmon. She crossed the rocks and scaled the bank, fleet as a deer, and unconscious of the pains and stiffness of her limbs.

Tom was in danger, and had shouted for her to escape!—that was all she knew or cared about. She topped the bank and burst from the scrub willows into the little clearing. She detected the scene of action at a glance, without pausing in her advance.

The young spruce tree, shorn of a few of its branches, lay between her and the men on

the ground. She saw that Tom was on top, but that the other man was slowly pulling himself into a better position. Yes, he was on his elbows now—and Tom did not seem to be trying to hold him down. What did it mean? Had Tom been shot? Was he dead? She crossed the little glade in two seconds and sprang across the fallen tree.

At that moment the terrible creature saw her, screamed a curse, and flung Tom's inert body clear of him. He struggled upward, drawing his feet under him, and thrusting out a hand in search of his fallen rifle. And he laughed with that shattered mouth of his. It was all as quick as lightning. Dorothy burned with rage and grief.

She felt no pity for that disfigured face. She swung the encased rod even while she was in the air.

"You have killed him," she screamed; and as her feet came to earth she struck full at that terrible face.

Canadian dodged the blow by falling backward; but though he saved his head he caught it, full force, on his shoulder. It knocked a yelp of pain out of him, for that was the shoulder that David Westley's iron fingers had gripped the night before. And here Dorothy lost a precious second of time and a precious advantage. She turned to glance at her brother;

and though he moved and sat up at the same instant, with no wound in evidence, the advantage was lost.

She sprang upon the hideous Indian and tried to press him back to the moss; but she had given him time to recover his balance. Her mind worked swiftly. She knew that Tom was alive; but she felt equally sure that he was in no condition to protect himself or her.

A side-glance showed him to her, leaning up on one elbow, his head nodding and his eyes glazed like a drunkard's. She guessed that he had been stunned and had escaped the bullet. It was up to her to overpower and bind this monster with the broken face. But for the knowledge of this fact she would have shrunk from touching the fellow with her hands; but now she hurled herself upon him and gripped his throat with her right hand.

A fearful struggle followed. She was at once too strong and not strong enough. Had she been less strong in muscle and spirit the fight would have been brief. But the fight was prolonged, and with every furious second of it the man lost in humanity and grew in deviltry.

He cursed her in hideous and unspeakable terms. He wrenched himself from under her hands and struck upward with his fist; but she caught him by the throat again. She could not bring herself to strike that horrid face with

her fist. He screamed unnamable threats. Twice he struck her, but never did the blow reach her with full force.

She was as quick as a cat. He fastened his fingers upon her clothing—and once upon her throat—and she tore herself away each time only to spring at him again. Half up, only to be beaten down again—mauled and buffeted—now within an ace of victory only to find his hands empty again—the man became an absolute devil.

The fury of the girl's strength ebbed slowly. At last he gripped and held her. Then she beat upon his face with her fists. He cursed at the agony of it, but laughed hideously. He flung her down—and then a rifle crashed in his ears and he sank back upon himself, limp, with one leg crumpled beneath him—dead!

Tom lowered the rifle from his shoulder, with a dazed yet satisfied expression on his face, and gazed at the result of his shot. He had fired at the devil's head, but had hit him under the shoulder—and it had not been a long or hard shot.

He remarked that it was a pretty good shot, considering the fact that he had forgotten the windage. He let the weapon fall across his knees. He still felt very groggy from the blow behind the ear.

"Buck up, Dot," he said. "You're safe as

a church. I've plugged the skunk—with his own rifle, too. Sit up and look at him. Pretty good rifle; but heavy, heavy. It took me about an hour to lift it—to get it up to my shoulder—and the sights are rotten.

"I came very near giving up hope of ever getting them in line, Dot. Well, I hit him, anyway. You fought like a hero, Dot—and all I could do was to sit and look on. Couldn't move a finger. Couldn't speak. Buck up. You aren't hurt, surely?"

Dorothy did not move. She lay where Steve Canadian had flung her, with closed eyes, ashen lips, and a colorless face. Her clothing was torn and disordered. Tom crawled over to her. He was sickeningly dizzy; but he dragged himself over the moss to her side.

"Oh!" he cried. "Did he kill you? I'll shoot him again. Open your eyes, Dot. Look at me. I shot him before he could kill you. I fixed him."

Then his eyes cleared a little of the blue and purple specks that showered across his vision. He felt for the beating of her heart and found it. He thanked God for that. He rubbed her wrists between his hands and set her dress as nearly to rights as he could.

"I'll get you some water in a minute," he said. "My head will be right as rain in a minute."

A husky bellow of consternation from close

at hand caused him to look up from his sister's unconscious face. Over the brow of the steep hill came a big man with a paddle in his hand. Tom noticed that the blade of the paddle dripped with water. He noticed this unimportant detail before he saw that the man was his friend David Westley. David was beside him in a second and down on his knees.

"You?" whispered David. "I heard the shot. I was looking for the fellow. Gabe told me something—and I guessed right. She isn't hurt, Tom? Her heart is going steady—God be praised. There is no blood. How did it happen, man? Yes, I feel her heart. I must get some water from the river."

"She's alive, right enough," said Tom. "She fought like ten men. I was hipped, you know—crocked—half dead. Got a crack behind the ear before she came up. Wish you'd happened along earlier, Dave."

Westley turned his eyes from the girl's white face and looked at the dead Indian with a sudden up-leap of hell fires in his eyes.

"I killed him," said Tom, following the other's glance. "They fought for hours—or it seemed hours to me—before I could lift his rifle. I thought she had him beaten more than once. But she couldn't stand the pace—and just when she gave out I got the foresight on his head. Didn't hit him on the head, though. You

needn't look at him like that, Dave. He's dead —dead as dogmeat. Better get that water."

Westley sprang to his feet and dashed away. He was back within the half-minute with his felt hat full of water. He knelt beside Dorothy and bathed her face and wrists. When the hat was empty he pulled a flask from his pocket and tenderly forced a little brandy between her lips and teeth. He rubbed her hands and wrists and forehead with the liquor. A faint suggestion of pink came back to her cheeks.

"I could do with a swallow of that brandy," remarked Tom, after he had looked on in silence for about ten minutes.

"I don't understand this," said David. "Why did she come—and how did she get into this state? Where is your canoe?"

"Give me a pull at that flask, and then I'll tell you," said Tom.

He took the flask from the other's hand, swallowed a gulp or two of the raw liquor, and returned the vessel. In a dozen words he told of the robbery and desertion.

"And we hoofed it as far as this. We found Gabe in the cove, bound and gagged in his canoe. I came up here for a pole and that fellow attacked me. He laid me out; and then Dorothy came to my rescue and tackled him," he concluded.

"She is coming around," whispered David,

who sat on the moss now with Dorothy's head on his arm.

The girl's eyelids fluttered up for a moment, only to fall again.

"I have a doctor at the post," said David, "and the sooner we get her there the better. God, she must have suffered tortures! Look at her face—and her hands."

"She hurt her hands trying to strangle that fellow," said Tom, with a nod of his head toward the lifeless body of Steve Canadian.

David Westley groaned and with his free hand brushed the sweat from his colorless face. Then he got to his feet, stooped and lifted Dorothy tenderly. So he stood for a moment, gazing at Tom across the slender senseless form in his arms.

"Why did she come into the Smoky River country?" he asked.

Tom scrambled unsteadily to his feet and put a hand against a young spruce for support. He laughed weakly.

"To be frank with you, Dave, she came to find out what the devil you were making such a fool of yourself for," he answered. "She could not understand—and she would not believe the worst. She had written several letters, you know. Or perhaps you don't know. Joice told her where to find you."

"And she might have been killed!" cried West-

ley, moving across the narrow glade with the girl in his arms, held tight against his breast.

Tom staggered after him, still very groggy, light-headed and light-hearted. Dorothy opened her eyes as David lowered her into the canoe upon a bed of folded blankets. She stared blankly into his face, then closed her eyes.

"Don't you know me?" cried David. "Don't you remember me?"

Gabe Bear, who now sat upright in the canoe, forward of the middle bar, looked at Westley and then at the girl's cut and fly-stung face.

"One fine girl, anyhow," he said.

Tom staggered out to the canoe and laid a hand on David's shoulder. The removal of the weight of care from his heart made him reckless.

"Dave," he said, "you are either a bounder or a fool. It's up to you to tell me which. I'm her brother. She's in my care. I can stand for a fool—but not for a bounder."

Westley's face flushed darkly and the veins stood out on his moist forehead. He did not look at Tom.

"Shut up—and get into the bow," he said. "We must hurry."

"Not so fast," returned Tom, who heard bells ringing pleasantly in his ears and saw the river, the hills and the canoe all swaying and rocking gently.

"Not so fast. I'm her brother. She's a fine girl—a fine woman. What I want to know is, what the devil did you mean by acting the way you did? D'you hear me?"

"Shut up!—and get into the canoe!" exclaimed Westley, turning sharply and glaring darkly upon the younger man.

"Don't you see that every minute counts—that we must get her to the doctor, and to a place where she can be decently nursed?"

Tom grinned; but his eyes did not look exactly normal. They were opaque and glistening like the eyes of a drunkard. The rap of the rifle-barrel behind the ear had gone to his head like many strong potations.

Westley saw and understood, and his expression changed.

"Of course, I'm a fool," he said. "Need I say it? I've been worse than a fool Tom. Now get in, for Heaven's sake."

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOU ARE A DUB"

The canoe, with its four occupants, crawled slowly up the sliding river. Tom Gordon sat in the bow, still very dizzy. He did not attempt to work, but occasionally applied a water-soaked handkerchief to the tender lump behind his ear. He pulled his hat low to shade his aching eyes against the glare of the sunlight on swift water.

Gabe Bear sat behind, with his back against the middle bar, staring straight ahead with expressionless eyes and trailing his puffy hands in the water. Dorothy reclined in the next section of the canoe, with her head in close contact with the small of Gabe's back. She lay upon blankets, on her right side, with her knees drawn up a little.

David had folded his coat against the middle bar to serve as a pillow for her. And at the girl's feet stood David, with legs well braced and body poised, surging upon the bending pole. His gray shirt was open at the neck, and his great, corded arms were bare to within a few inches of the shoulders.

He wore Indian-tanned moccasins and gray

woollen socks on his feet. His jaws were set hard, and his half-shut eyes shifted continually from the river ahead and the curving shores to the face of the girl at his feet. After every ten thrusts of the pole he stooped forward swiftly, scooped his right hand in the river, and bathed Dorothy's face.

Dorothy's upper lip was cut, and a red patch glowed upon the tender skin above the right eye—the work of Steve Canadian's fist. David looked down upon these things and his heart shook in his side and his soul raged and melted with many conflicting emotions.

"Tom," he said suddenly, "what about Walter Joice?"

"Well, what about him?" returned the man in the bow.

"You know what I mean. Tell me straight. I know nothing."

"Then it's your own fault if you are so dashed ignorant. Joice played the game. He never had the ghost of a chance. There was never any question of Joice."

"Then why didn't he say so when he was in here last spring?"

"Say so? Why should he? I never heard that he was your guardian or your nurse. Dave, you make me tired! He knew, I suppose, that Dot had written to you—and I suppose he thought that a chap who had made such an ass

of himself as you have—who had shown so little consideration for others as you have—was not worth enlightening."

"Oh, I agree with everything you say," exclaimed David, bitterly.

"It has taken you a long time to see the truth," replied Tom.

At that moment David lowered his glance to Dorothy's face and he saw her open eyes full upon him. He sank quickly to his knees and bent forward.

"Do you know me?" he whispered. "Tell me, Dorothy—do you know me?"

Her lips moved a little, silently, and her eyes said "yes."

But he saw a shadow in her clear eyes and did not know if it was of doubt or pain. The canoe began to drop back, so he arose quickly and bent again to the pole. He kept his eyes fixed upon hers.

"She wrote to you," said Tom, ignorant of what was going on behind him. "Did you get the letter—or letters?"

David answered at the top of his voice, his gaze steady upon the girl's brightening and darkening orbs.

"I behaved like a cad," he said. "I was jealous. I—I burned them unopened—God forgive me! I thought you—she did not care."

Red flooded up into Dorothy's face and

slipped away again, her eyes darkened and softened and then the lids fluttered down.

"You are a dub," cried Tom, heavily. "A dub, d'you hear? I've a good mind to fight you when we get ashore. You make me sick. You burned the letters, unopened, did you? What right had you to do that? And here she's been eating her heart out—and now she's half-dead. If I had known you had received those letters and not read them I wouldn't have let her come. No, not a step—because you are not worth it."

David's face was white and drawn with shame; but in his eyes shone a light of victory and joy. He surged mightily on the bending pole.

The tramp through the woods, the poison of the fly-stings, the terrific battle with Steve Canadian were too much for even Dorothy Gordon's sound body and dauntless spirit.

She was weary, body and soul. Her muscles ached dully, and her nerves were raw. Her mind went far afield, in a haze of gray and purple, harking back to old days and old faces.

She forgot the struggle with the thing with the devil's face—the fury of the fight and the horror of defeat. She forgot the canoe and the sliding river. She saw David, knew him, then closed her eyes and drifted far away again.

When David lifted her in his arms at the

canoe-landing in front of Two Moose, she was talking indistinctly and quickly. Stars were shining, and the sun had been down these last two hours.

He carried her up the bank and across the clearing, with Tom Gordon walking close and unsteady at his heels. Dogs that had come in on the last snow with their masters from the trapping-grounds barked, and howled, and leaped around them in the uncertain gloom. It was a sultry night, and the windows and doors of the huts and shacks were open, pushing back the darkness with broad smudges of yellow lamplight.

A whippoorwill sent forth his plaintive, volleying cry from somewhere at the edge of the clearing.

David strode forward, heedless of the dogs that leaped against him in friendliness, and fell back and slunk away suspiciously from the burden he carried. Anything suggestive of human suffering stills the rollicking in a good dog's breast. David passed his own shack, making for that of Rosie MacKim.

Dorothy stirred slightly in his arms and put up a wavering hand that brushed lightly across his face.

"But you don't understand, daddy," she said, in a hurried, toneless voice. "It was my fault as much as his. I know that he loves me, and I

do not care at all for the thing you call pride. If I thought that he did not love me, then I should try to forget him."

David lowered his face quickly and touched his lips to her brow. As he stepped into the patch of light thrown out by Rosie's open door Marie Benoit stepped across the threshold from within and halted in front of him with a low cry of dismay. Her bright, black eyes flashed from David's face to the helpless figure in his arms.

"Who is it?" she whispered. "Is she dead?"

"She is alive, thank Heaven," returned David, striding past her and entering the cabin. Tom, following unsteadily, stumbled against Marie.

To save himself from falling he clutched her in his arms. She squirmed around with a little scream and confronted him with a beautiful and agitated face shining within six inches of his own. Marie seems to have been ordained by fate for such situations.

"Beg pardon," exclaimed Tom, smiling vaguely and pleasantly down at her. "My fault entirely. I feel a bit shaky, you know. Must go in after David and my sister, I suppose."

Marie trembled.

"Your sister, *monsieur*? Is it she he loves?" she asked.

"I don't think there can be any doubt about that," replied Tom.

"You must let me go, *monsieur*. I am going home," said Marie, not unkindly.

Tom let his arms fall. "Oh, I *beg* your pardon!" he cried.

"It is granted, *monsieur*," said Marie softly as she slipped away.

Tom uttered a bewildered and fatuous laugh and stumbled into the living-room and kitchen of the MacKim home. At the same moment David and Pierre MacKim entered from an inner room. Tom sat down weakly in a ragged armchair.

"She will be well looked after now," said David. "My friend, Mrs. MacKim, is putting her to bed. This is Pierre MacKim, another good friend of mine. I hear that the doctor is at No. 1 camp, so I'll have to start after him immediately. Pierre will show you the way over my shack and get you whatever you want."

"All I want is an ice-bag on the back of my neck," said Tom, and then, without more ado, and smiling cheerily, he fainted in the chair.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDERSTANDING AT LAST

"Chuck some water over him and give him brandy; then you'd better put him to bed," said David Westley to Pierre MacKim.

Without waiting to see his orders carried out he left the cabin and set out swiftly across the clearing toward the mouth of the wood-road which led to No. 1 camp.

Anxiety for Dorothy, shame of himself, wonder and joy filled his breast to the point of suffocation. She had come to him through hardships and dangers; she had opened her eyes and looked at him with recognition and nothing of accusation, as he had laid her on Rosie MacKim's best bed, and had smiled up at him and whispered his name.

Heavens! Who was he to deserve this? What had he ever done to deserve it? And what had he not done to cut him off forever from this?

He passed within a foot of Marie Benoit without seeing her. He reached the woods and hurried forward along the black road. Sudden-

ly he stopped short with a low exclamation of dismay. What of the new life now? Was this the end of it?

"Let it go!" he said, advancing again. "It has served its purpose. It has taught me a wonderful thing, and the bitterest truth a man can learn. Duff can look after all this."

He waved a hand in the dark. "It is a small thing to give up—for her—Heaven knows!"

He found the doctor at the camp and started back to the post with him, explaining Dorothy's case and something of his story as they hurried along.

These two were about half-way between the camp and the post when a canoe touched the gravel below the big clearing. A white man sprang out of the bow and ran up the bank, leaving a half-breed guide to lift the canoe out of the worry of the current and collect the paddles and dunnage.

The white man went straight to David Westley's cabin. It was Walter Joice, come back to tell that which he should have told before. He found David's door fastened and the windows black.

"He may be over at the factor's," he said. "Now is my time to see that factor, anyway, and get the secret about that story out of him. There may be nothing in it, of course, but now that I am here I may as well make sure."

So he went over to the big house in a curious but not unkindly mood. He felt a certain healing calm of contentment now that he had not known for a long time, due to his actions and intentions of the past three days and for the immediate future.

He was playing the game. By the time he had made all that he knew known to David Westley the one slip that he made—the one unsportsmanlike play that he had been guilty of—would be nullified. He had left the train three days ago, below St. Ann's, with his own guide and canoe, and pressed straight up Old Smoky without exchanging a word with the villagers.

So he had not heard anything of the young man and young woman who had set out for Two Moose before him, accompanied by Bill Towly.

For three days he and his man had plied pole and paddle, turn and turn about, thrusting up the rattles and lesser rapids, and passing over portages at a jog trot. They had made a record trip.

Captain Joice stepped onto the factor's veranda and knocked on the door. It was opened to him by an old Indian woman. He glanced over her shoulder and saw the factor standing in the doorway of the sitting-room, looking at him.

Their eyes met. Grant flung up his right hand with a vague and feeble gesture and stepped backward into the room. Joice gasped, stood for a moment as if frozen to the threshold of the house, then pushed the old squaw aside and sprang into the sitting-room.

Grant leaned against the edge of the table, facing him like a thing at bay. And yet there was no suggestion of the wish or intention to fight in the factor's eyes. He looked cornered, beaten, and resigned.

"Who are you?" cried Joice, stepping close and staring into the thin, bearded face, and mild, despairing eyes. "Who are you?"

"You know," said the other, his voice as thin as a whisper.

"But I don't know!" exclaimed Joice. "The man I think you are is dead!"

They gazed at each other for a full minute, with lifeless faces and eyes that brightened and darkened like lamps in the wind.

"Then for Heaven's sake, if you have any mercy, let it be so," said Grant at last. "Let your cousin, who died in South Africa, remain dead, and let Donald Grant live on."

"How was it done?" asked Joice, sitting down weakly in the nearest chair.

"Ask your father. He is a clever, and a proud man, Heaven bless him," replied Grant.

They were silent for a long time. Then Joice

said: "Can't it be managed in some way? I have come in for a property that should be yours. It is worth a good deal. I don't need it."

"Keep it, and let things be as they are," returned the factor. "I want to live out my new life—the new life of Donald Grant. See these letters. I can make a living. I am going back to the world. Be merciful, Walter—merciful to a coward."

Joice took the factor's hand.

"Your life is your own, Dick, though your grave is another man's," he said with a choking laugh. "Well, this clears the mystery of the book with a vengeance!"

They talked quietly for nearly half an hour. They were disturbed by the opening of the front door and hurried steps in the hall.

David Westley entered the room.

"Grant," he cried, "Steve Canadian is dead."

David did not take much sleep that night. He spent the black hours between his own shack (where Tom snored in his bunk), the factor's sitting-room, and Rosie MacKim's cabin.

Now he smoked beside his own door, or questioned the sleepy doctor within; now he paced the dry moss of the clearing, gazing at the shaded light in the room where Dorothy lay and Rosie MacKim sat watching, and again he joined the cousins in the factor's house, and

gave ear, with a fragment of his mind, to fragments of that strange history.

Shortly after dawn he fell asleep in one of Grant's chairs. It was seven o'clock when he awoke. He sprang from the chair, scarcely noticing that Grant and Joice were still smoking and talking, and ran across the sunlit clearing to the MacKim cabin. Rosie met him at the door.

"She slept like a babe, the dear heart," said Rosie, "and now she calls for you, M. le Boss."

David had nothing to say to that, and no voice. He passed Rosie and went into the little bedroom. Rosie closed the door behind him.

Dorothy was sitting up against the pillows, with a blanket about her shoulders. Much of the swelling had gone from her tender face. Her eyes were bright and gentle. She put out her hands, one of which was bandaged.

David sprang forward, sank to his knees beside the bed, seized her hands, and pressed them to his face. She looked down at his bent head.

"Poor boy," she whispered. "Did you think I did not love you?"

"I was sure of it," he murmured, kissing her hands again and again. But he did not look up. "I was a fool!"

"Did you think that you did not love me?" she asked, smiling down at his bent head.

"No, but I tried to forget it," he whispered.

"Are you glad?" she asked.

At that he raised his head and looked at her. Tears sparkled on her lashes and her cheeks were pink. On brow and lip he saw the marks of the man's fury.

His face went white as the pillows. He got slowly to his feet, shaking in every muscle, leaned over the bed, slipped an arm behind her shoulders, and kissed her with passionate reverence upon the trembling lips and bright, wet eyes.

"I came because I knew," she said a minute later.

He could only repeat that he had been a fool, and worse. Her head, with its braided hair, was upon his shoulder. She laughed up at him.

"But I planned to go out for a little while," he said. "I started once, and was stopped by some trouble here. I meant to start again tomorrow to make sure of the truth. The madness was working out of me, dear."

"I am glad I came," she replied. "It was hard, but I won through to you, and found you in your own country."

He trembled as he thought of what she had battled through.

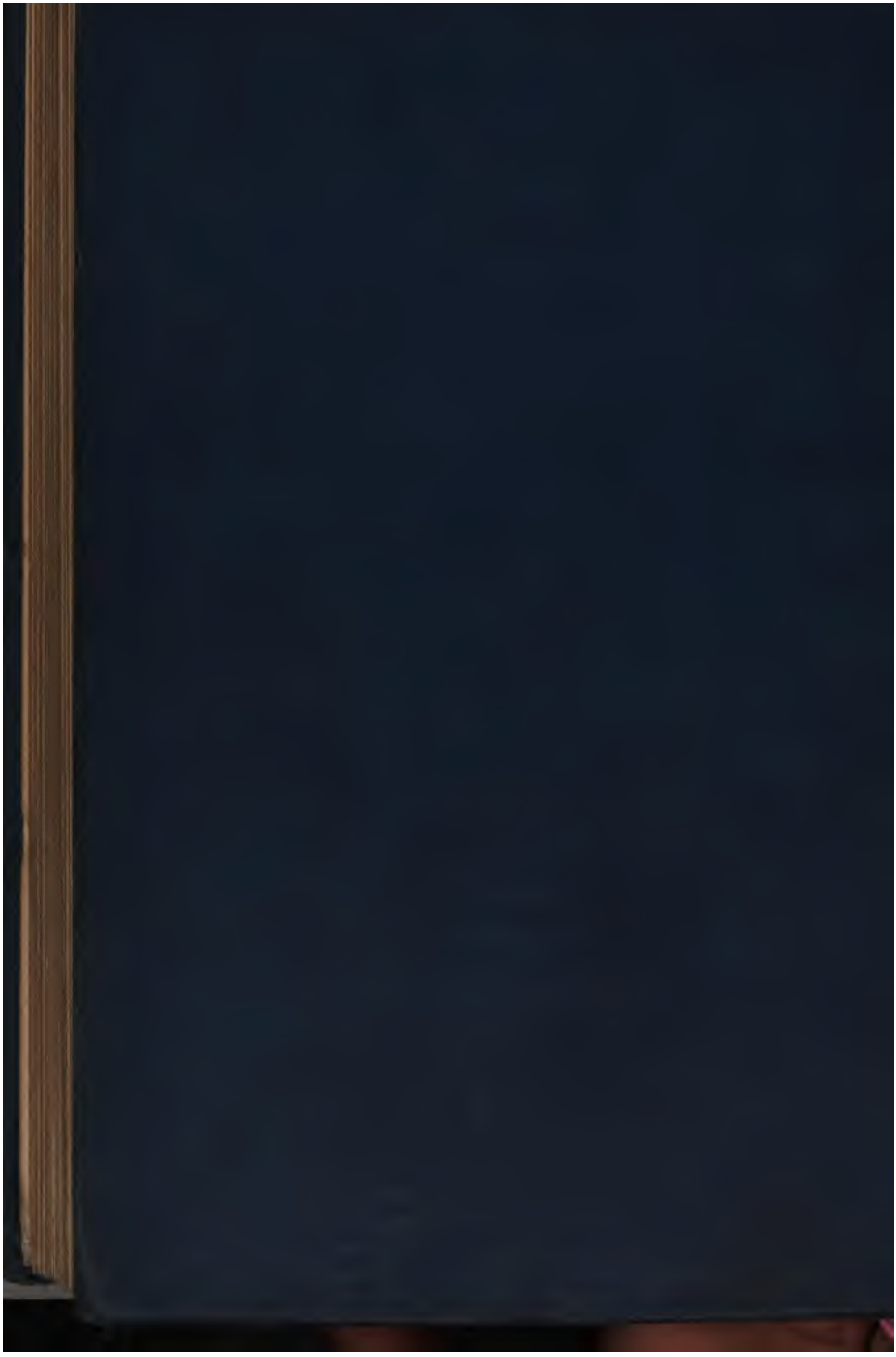
"It is a wild and desolate country," he said. "I have grown fond of it, but it would be unbearable to you. We shall go back in a few

days—as soon as you are strong enough for the journey."

"Only to return within the month," she said. "It is your country. Your work is here, Dave, and here I found you—and myself, too, I think. Dave, I am a braver woman than I thought, and I am wise. I was not sure, in the old days, that I was at all brave or at all wise.

"Let this be our country. I know how they like you, Dave—Rosie, and Pierre, and the doctor, and the men in the camps, and the trappers—and perhaps they will learn to love me a little. We could not find so many dear people in New York and London to love us. And here, between the river and the forest, I think that wisdom will stay with us—and peace. I think our happiness will be safe here."

"Heaven bless you," whispered David, kissing her again.

THE END.

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